

With Saint Vincent



*We build together
to bring hope to life*

**Proceedings
of the AIC International
Assembly of Delegates**

12-15th March 2017

Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne, France

Associacions present:



Present through prayer:

Argentina, Chad, Egypt, Guyana, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nigeria, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Syria.

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Programme for the Assembly

Saturday 11th March

*Arrival of all the participants
Meeting of the outgoing Executive Board*

Sunday 12th March

St Vincent

- 08:30-10:30** **Opening Ceremony**
- 1) **Welcome speech**
 - 2) **Opening session** (*Alicia Duhne*)
 - 3) **Presentation of the AIC delegations** (*María Eugenia Magallanes*)
 - 4) **Presentation of the activity reports of the AIC network and the EB** (*Alicia Duhne*)
- 10:30-12:00** **Opening Mass** (*F. Tomaz Mavric, C.M., F. Blot and the AIC National Spiritual Advisors*)
- 12:30-13:00** **Toast of honour**
- 13:00-14:30** Lunch
- 14:45-15:00** **Presentation of the candidates** (*Sumaia Sahade*)
- 15:00-15:45** **Saint Vincent: “Vincent de Paul, a leader for our time”** (*F. Celestino Fernández, C.M.*)
- 15:45-16:30** **Workshops for reflection: “Vincentian spirituality in our grassroots actions today”**
- 16:30-17:00** Break
- 17:00-18:30** **The History of AIC** (*Presentation from the Past Presidents*)
- 19:00-20:30** Dinner
- 21:00-22:00** **Meeting for Spiritual Advisors** (*with F. Tomaz Mavric C.M.*)

Monday 13th March

St Louise

- 08:30-09:30** **Eucharist** (*F. Bertrand Ponsart, C.M.*)
- 10:00-10:15** **Introduction to the day** (*key theme*)
- 10:15-11:00** **St Louise and Charity** (*Sr Pilar Caycho, D.C.*)
- 11:00-11:15** **Introduction to the workshops** (*Sr Françoise Petit, D.C.*)
- 11:15-11:45** Break
- 11:45-12:15** **Workshops: “The teaching of St Louise to welcome ‘the stranger’ today”** (*Sr Françoise Petit, D.C.*)
- 12:30-14:00** Lunch
- 14:00-14:30** **Journey to Chatillon** (Church of St André)
- 14:45-18:45** **Solemn presentation of the AIC Charter and start of pilgrimage to Vincentian places in Chatillon**

- 18:45** Journey to the Espace Bel Air
- 19:15-20:30** Dinner
- 20:30-21:30** Musical Comedy about St Vincent *(by pupils from the Collège St Charles in Châtillon)*

Tuesday 14th March

The Common Home

- 08:30-09:30** Eucharist *(F. A. Mauricio Fernández C.M.)*
- 10:00-10:15** Introduction to the day *(key theme)*
- 10:15-10:45** ***Laudato Si: "Caring for Creation as a new work of mercy"*** *(F. A. Mauricio Fernández, C.M.)*
- 11:00-11:30** Break
- 11:30-12:30** The "Common Home" and AIC's grassroots actions in line with the UN's SDGs - Workshops *(International Secretariat)*
- 12:30-14:00** Lunch
- 14:30-16:30** The "Common Home" and AIC's grassroots actions in line with the UN's SDGs - Workshops *(International Secretariat)*
- 16:30-17:00** Break
- 17:00-18:00** Plenary Assembly
- a) AIC Charter *(Alicia Duhne)*
 - b) AIC Diploma *(Laurence de la Brosse and María Eugenia Magallanes)*
 - c) Constitutional changes *(Tayde de Callataj)*
 - d) The AIC network's means of communication *(Alicia Duhne et Tayde de Callataj)*
- 19:00-20:30** Dinner
- 21:15-22:00** Evening in the Churches of Ars and Chatillon

Wednesday 15th March

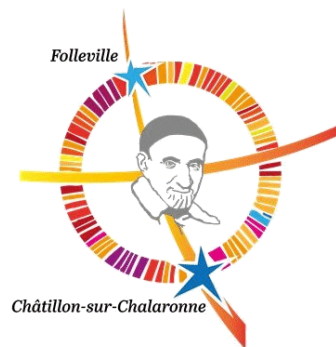
Celebrating the 400th anniversary

- 10:00-11:30** Solemn Mass in Chatillon *(Cardinal Ph. Barbarin)*
- 11:30-12:00** Journey to the Espace Bel Air
- 12:30-14:00** Lunch
- 14:30-14:45** Introduction to the afternoon session *(key theme)*
- 14:45-16:30** Statutory Assembly *(Tayde de Callataj)*
- 16:30-17:00** Break
- 17:00-18:30** Closing Session: Evaluation and commitments *(Alicia Duhne)*
- 19:00-20:30** Dinner
- 21:00-22:30** Talent show

Thursday 16th March

*Departure of all the participants – except the EB members – after breakfast
From 16th-18th March: Meeting of the newly elected Executive Board members*

With the generous support of:



and the many people who have made this meeting possible.

Introduction to the Assembly

Alicia Duhne, Internacional President

Opening Remarks:

Personally, and in the name of AIC International, I express my gratitude for the presence of all those who are accompanying us at this time. Some of you have traveled from faraway places, while others had a much shorter journey... but all have gathered together with enthusiasm and so I welcome you to this Assembly!

Many thanks to the people of Châtillon for their warm and enthusiastic welcome: the mayor, Patrick Mathias, the AIC volunteers, the Daughters of Charity, Father Blot, and residents of this town (especially those who are accompanying us at this time). From the time that we initiated preparations for this event, you have provided us with unconditional support.

As I came to Châtillon, I said: *Look, we will not only have with us the two successors of Saint Vincent, that is, Father Tomaž, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and Father Blot, pastor of Saint Andrew's parish, but we will also have the descendants of those persons who shared their lives with our beloved Vincent de Paul.* Therefore, it is a great joy to have you here with us.

Bishop Dal Toso, it is also a great honor to have you here with us as a representative of Pope Francis. We know that you have a great love and esteem for our Association and this is, in fact, the second time that you are accompanying us... it is a pleasure to have you with us at this event.

Father Tomaž, we are all grateful for your presence here. We consider it an honor that you have taken the time to share in this event. When, at the beginning of your term of office as Superior General, we invited you to join us, you immediately responded with an affirmative answer.

We are also grateful for the presence of César Saldaña, the International President of MISEVI who has traveled from Mexico in order to be with us... we thank you for your continued support.

We want to greet Marie Françoise Salesiani-Payet, who is present among us and is representing Renato Lima de Oliveira, International President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

To all the participants who have made a commitment to participate in these four days of reflection, namely, the AIC volunteers, the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Congregation of the Mission... we thank you for your presence and we pray that this time together will produce much fruit on behalf of *our lords and masters*.

We also pray that the various presentations will enable us to deepen our understanding of the charisma of Vincent de Paul, this extraordinary man of action. Vincent did not speak much about peace or about justice, but he labored constantly on behalf of peace and justice.

We are going to have the opportunity to listen to various people recount for us the history of AIC. Others will speak about the teaching of Vincent and Louise and we will then reflect together on the

relationship between those teachings and the teaching of Pope Francis as presented in his encyclical, *Laudato Sí*... and the relationship of all of this with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

We pray for the success of this Assembly... may Christ, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise accompany us.

Therefore, today, March 12, 2017 at 10:00am, I formally open the proceedings of this International Assembly at this time when we celebrate the 400th anniversary of our foundation in Châtillon.

Introduction:

Before introducing our presenters allow me to speak a few words that I hope will clarify the relationship between the Vincentian themes and the message of Pope Francis as well as the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

God created the world: the heavens, the seas, the land and all living things: minerals, water creatures, vegetables, animals... God also created us, men and women, and created us in his image, free and gifted with intelligence (Genesis 1).

What does it mean when we say that the whole world is interrelated and interconnected, in other words, what does it mean when we say that we cannot speak about the planet in its physical dimensions (global warming, mineral resources, drinking water) without connecting that dimension to the human person.

It is for that reason that Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato Sí*, invites us to restore those bonds that unite God, humankind and the planet. The Pope invites us to struggle for such global unity on the most profound level... if we wanted to summarize the teaching of the Pope's encyclical, we would use the word, *interconnected*.

More specifically, the Pope invites us to reflect on the manner in which we view ourselves and the world, to reflect on our commitment to care for our planet.

At the same time, the United Nations, through seventeen goals for sustainable development, places before us very specific objectives that are to be achieved by 2030, objectives that are intended to lead to the eradication of poverty and thus are further intended to protect and guarantee prosperity for all people. Therefore, governments, the private sector and society in general, are invited to join together in this effort.

We, as AIC members, work together on local projects and are inspired by the words of Pope Francis with regard to the need *to respect the rights of peoples and cultures (Laudato Sí, #144)*.

Therefore, in this Assembly we plan to be guided by the following idea: to reestablish vital interconnections (spiritual, relational, material) with all people, but especially with those persons who live in the midst of situations of poverty.

We have proposed that the idea of **sustainable human development**, remains at the forefront of our reflections during this Assembly. Hopefully, the very theme of our reflections will help us in that regard: **400 years with Saint Vincent on a journey towards the future in our Common Home.**

The Pope's Message for AIC

In this year 2017, you celebrate the 400 years of the first Brotherhoods of Charity, founded by Saint Vincent of Paul at Chatillon. It is with joy that I unite myself spiritually with you to celebrate this anniversary and I express all my good wishes for this beautiful work to continue its mission of contributing a genuine testimony of God's mercy to the poorest. May this anniversary be for you the occasion to give thanks to God for His gifts and to be open to His surprises, to discern new ways, under the breath of the Holy Spirit, so that your service of charity is ever more fruitful!

The Charities were born of the tenderness and the compassion of the heart of Monsieur Vincent for the poorest, often marginalized and abandoned in the countryside and in the cities. His action for and with them intended to reflect God's goodness for His creatures. He saw the poor as representatives of Jesus Christ, as members of His suffering Body; he realized that the poor, also, were called to build the Church and that in turn they convert us.

Following Vincent de Paul who entrusted the care of his poor to laymen, and more particularly to women, your association wishes to promote the development of less privileged persons and to relieve their poverties, the material, physical, moral and spiritual poverties. And it is in God's Providence that the foundation of this engagement is found. What is Providence if not the love of God that acts in the world and calls for our cooperation? Today I would like to encourage you again to accompany persons in their totality, bringing a particular attention to the precarious conditions of life of numerous women and children. A life of faith, a life united to Christ enables us to perceive the reality of the person, his incomparable dignity, not at first as a limited reality of material goods, of social, economic and political problems but to see him as a being created in the image and likeness of God, as a brother or a sister, as our neighbor for whom we are responsible. To "see" these poverties and to make oneself close, it is not enough to follow great ideas but to live of the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery so dear to Saint Vincent of Paul, mystery of this God who abased Himself by becoming man, who lived among us and died "to raise man and save him." These are not beautiful words, because "it is about the being itself and the action of God." It is the realism that we are called to live as Church. It is why a human promotion, a genuine liberation of man does not exist without the proclamation of the Gospel "because the most sublime aspect of human dignity is found in man's vocation to commune with God."

In the Bull of proclamation for the opening of the Jubilee Year, I expressed the wish that "the years to come be so impregnated with mercy so as to go to the encounter of each one by offering him the goodness and tenderness of God" (n. 5)! I invite you to follow this way. The Church's credibility passes through the merciful love and compassion that open to hope. This credibility passes also through your personal testimony: it is not only about encountering Christ in the poor, but that the poor perceive Christ in you and in your action. Being rooted in the personal experience of Christ, you will also be able to contribute to a "culture of mercy" which renews hearts profoundly and opens to a new reality.

Finally, I would like to invite you to contemplate the charism of Saint Louise de Marillac, to whom Monsieur Vincent entrusted the leadership and coordination of the Charities, and to find in him that fineness and that delicacy of mercy that never wounds and never humiliates anyone but that lifts, gives back courage and hope.

On entrusting you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, as well as to the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul and of Saint Louise de Marillac, I confer upon you the Apostolic Blessing and ask you to pray for me!

Pope Francis



Homily of the Opening Mass

F. Tomaz Mavric, CM, Superior General of the Vincentian Family

It is an honor and a privilege for me to be here with you today to celebrate this Eucharist together. As the successor of Saint Vincent, I am delighted to join with the members of his very first foundation as you celebrate its 400th anniversary. Our Holy Founder could never have dreamed that, from the eight women, literally a mustard seed, who, on 23 August 1617, “charitably joined forces to take their turn to assist the sick poor of the town of Châtillon,” 400 years later, there would be the large tree that is the International Association of Charities. That is not all, for your organization was the forerunner of some 225 other branches, now known as the Vincentian Family and present in 150 countries with over two million members throughout the world.



Saint Vincent was exceptional in responding to the promptings of the Spirit. He did not hesitate to involve the laity and, in particular, women, in his undertakings, as we read in the account of the Charity of Women:

Because, however, it is to be feared that this good work, once begun, might die out in a short time if they do not have some union and spiritual bond among themselves to maintain it, they have arranged to form an association that can be set up as a confraternity.

From the beginning, he recognized their capacities and did not shirk from giving them a place in the service of the Church, the people of God. When that first Confraternity of Charity was established on 8 December in Châtillon, the women themselves took on all the roles of administration, with one exception. In keeping with the thinking of the time:

Because there is reason to hope that there will be foundations made in aid of the confraternity, and that it is not appropriate for women to handle them on their own, the Servants of the Poor will elect as their Procurator some pious, devout priest or an inhabitant of the town who is virtuous, devoted to the good of persons who are poor, and not too caught up in temporal affairs.

Obviously, this is no longer the case, because women throughout the world hold positions involving finances, including in your own organization.

In setting up this first Confraternity of Charity, Saint Vincent outlined, in great detail, how the women were to provide their services to the sick: “she will also bring him other small items he needs, such as a bed tray, a napkin, a cup, a pitcher, a small plate and a spoon.” However, he also insisted on spiritual service to the sick, “the Servants of the Poor will strive and take great pains to dispose those who

recuperate to live better, and those who seem to be approaching death, to die well.” Realizing that these good women could not give what they did not have, he also outlined for them a series of devotional practices and told them to “take care in practicing humility, simplicity, and charity, each deferring to her companion and to others.”

Our Founder constantly challenged the Ladies to live up to the commitments they had made. Who could forget his famous conference, urging them to continue caring for the Foundlings:

Well then, Ladies, compassion and charity have led you to adopt these little creatures as your own children; you have been their mothers according to grace since the time their mothers according to nature abandoned them. See now whether you, too, want to abandon them. Stop being their mothers to be their judges at present; their life and death are in your hands. I'm going to take the vote; it's time to pass sentence on them and to find out whether you are no longer willing to have pity on them. If you continue to take charitable care of them, they will live; if, on the contrary, you abandon them, they will most certainly perish and die; experience does not allow you to doubt that.

I too wish to challenge you today. As I just mentioned, Vincent insisted on both the spiritual service of the sick and the Ladies' attention to their own spiritual needs. I encourage you to make sure all your works have a spiritual foundation and that each of you is grounded in Vincentian spirituality too. To do this, you must be careful to assure your own formation, as well as that of those you serve. In this digital age, there is no dearth of materials available for this purpose. Your Association website provides training booklets and spiritual reflections. The FamVin website has an entire section devoted to formation.

Even in his time, Saint Vincent sought to move beyond simple charitable assistance and prepare persons who were poor to improve their own lot in life. This was done in a number of ways: the Daughters of Charity ran schools, especially for girls; some Confraternities provided workshops where the able-bodied and youth could learn a trade; and the Ladies sent seeds and tools to the devastated areas of the country. You too must move from welfare to actions that will promote those who are poor. It is for this reason that we established the Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change. It is important that we do not just assist those who are poor, but help lift them out of their poverty.

Saint Vincent told the Ladies that:

[A] means of maintaining the Company is to do your part to fill it with other devout, virtuous Ladies. For, if you don't encourage other persons to join, it will be short of members and, with dwindling numbers, will be too weak to carry these pressing burdens any further. That's why it was suggested in the past that the Ladies who were close to death should prepare in advance a daughter, a sister, or a friend to join the Company.

In my letter of 25 January, I encouraged you along the same lines: each one of us, collectively in groups or individually, will set for himself or herself, during this Jubilee Year, this concrete goal: to pray, be attentive, look for, encourage, and invite one new candidate to the consecrated life for one of the Congregations within the Vincentian Family or to join one of its lay branches as a member. I trust you will commit yourselves to this effort and develop innovative strategies for increasing your numbers.

In his time, Vincent noted that people “have sometimes suffered a great deal, more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons.” While that is less of a problem today, there is still the need for collaboration and cooperation among various agencies and organizations, both governmental and charitable. In the same way, the different branches of the Vincentian Family must work together to assure that the very best service is provided for our “lords and masters.” If each of us is centered upon his or her own works, ignoring what other branches do for the same purpose, our efforts to assist the less fortunate will not be as efficacious. For that reason, I urge you to develop and participate in common projects, in collaboration with the entire AIC, as well as other branches of our Vincentian Family. In this year dedicated to “welcoming the stranger,” we are putting forth an effort to reduce homelessness throughout the world. This project can associate all the branches of our Family. You will hear more about it in the coming months.

Let me reiterate these challenges:

- Provide a good spiritual base for all your works and solid spiritual and Vincentian formation for your members.
- See to it that your actions do not only assist the poor, but also, through methods of systemic change, seek to lift them out of their poverty.
- Work to increase your numbers by inviting others to join forces with you.
- Collaborate among yourselves and on common projects with other branches of the Vincentian Family.

In closing, allow me to make my own the words of our Holy Founder:

Let's ask God to accept the new offering we're going to make Him on our knees, by giving ourselves to His Divine Majesty with all our hearts to receive from His infinite goodness the spirit of charity. Let's also ask Him to grant us the grace of corresponding in this spirit to the plans He has for each of us in particular and for the Company in general, and to inspire everywhere this spirit of fervor for the charity of Jesus Christ, in order to merit that He may shed it abundantly on us and, by helping us to produce the effects of it in this world, may make us eternally pleasing to God His Father in the next. Amen.

F. Tomaž Mavrič, CM - Superior General

Vincent de Paul, a leader for the present era

F. Celestino Fernández, CM

I have always compared Vincent to a large thick forest, fearsome and difficult to traverse. Throughout history there have been individuals whose global movement can be immediately grasped. They present almost no complication to the observer. But Vincent de Paul's life, personality, psychology, journey, activity, spirituality, and institutions cannot be understood in any lineal manner because they did not develop in a lineal manner.

If we approach Vincent de Paul with a predetermined perspective, we will be surprised when this historical figure escapes our understanding. Nevertheless, that is the reality because we find ourselves standing before and reflecting upon a good and energetic person, an active and contemplative individual, an intellectual man who was not prone to intellectual debates and ramblings, traditional and innovative, collaborative, flexible (and at the same time inflexible), affective but not sentimental, ironic and at the same time serious, prayerful and committed, idealist but clearly in touch with reality, spendthrift yet economical, distrustful but trusting, a tireless worker who was repulsed by activism, committed to God and committed to a wide diversity of "neighbors". All of these opposing and, at times, contradictory characteristics can be documented with texts, anecdotes and decisions that Vincent made. In summary, Vincent was a man open to life... and life cannot be systematized.



But everyone is in agreement about one characteristic, namely, Vincent was a leader. If we analyze and reflect on Vincent's life and experience, on his existential development and his fundamental option, and on the unique gift that we refer to as charisma... then, we immediately recognize the person of Vincent de Paul as a leader. In other words, we find ourselves in the presence of an individual who opened new horizons and paths, an individual who had, and continues to have, a great influence on countless situations.

There was no exaggeration when the bishop of Puy, Henri Maupas du Tour preached the funeral oration of Vincent de Paul and stated: *this man has totally changed the face of the Church*. Those words were not exaggerated because Vincent's influence and effective leadership was very evident not only in the Church and in French society, but also in so many areas beyond the borders of France.

A theme that is taken as a given

A theme that is taken as a given

As we approach this theme of Vincent's leadership, we discover that there has been very little research done on this facet of Vincent's life. My impression is that the theme is taken as a given and yet it underlies all the other aspects of Vincent's life. We could say that there is nothing new or original about this theme because it is the special trait that characterized all of Vincent's life and ministry.

We constantly say that Vincent was ahead of his time, especially in those areas related to service on behalf of the poor and the struggle for the recognition of the dignity of those persons marginalized and excluded from participation in society. We also state that the institutions that Vincent founded bear an unmistakable stamp of originality. Furthermore, Vincent's boldness and creativity continually make his followers question themselves ... here we refer to his boldness and creativity in opening new paths that led to a change in the unjust and marginalizing religious, social, political and economic structures. We are also reassured that Vincent's economic and organizational vision with regard to the poor is a model for all of us living in the twenty-first century.

Therefore, when we speak about Vincent de Paul, we are taking for granted the fact that his leadership, his influence and his example are not limited to the events and situations of the seventeenth century. When we reflect on Vincent's words and activities, we are reflecting on someone whose moral convictions guided and attracted others to follow in his footsteps.

Referring to Vincent's leadership, someone has stated that in the twenty-first century there is such a need for that type of leadership that if it had not existed in the person and the activity of Vincent de Paul, then, we would have had to find a way to invent it.

The leadership of Vincent de Paul

When we use the word, *leader* or pronounce the word, *leadership*, we immediately associate those words with multiple concepts: someone who is at the head of some group; someone who wins a competition; someone who is able to attract others to participate in a social, religious or political movement; someone who is able to exercise power and influence over a group; one who with a certain authority guides a group of followers; one who stands out above others because of his/her ideas and/or actions ...

We are dealing with a word that linguists refer to as *polysemic*, that is, a word that has many meanings but always has a common denominator: there is always a reference to guiding, directing, conducting or moving ahead of others in the area of ideas and action.

Can we apply all of this to Vincent de Paul? Certainly... but with one important note: in his leadership style Vincent incorporated a specific yet fundamental element, namely, service. Usually we associate a leader with power and authority but in Vincent de Paul leadership is exercised through service on behalf of those who are poor, who are in need, and who are vulnerable,

Vincent de Paul was very clear about Jesus' teaching about leadership as stated in the Gospel of Luke: *The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as "benefactors"; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant* (Luke 22:15-26). Vincent was also very clear with regard to the example of the Master: *You call me "teacher" and "master", and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet* (John 13:14-15).

Thus, we can apply to Vincent de Paul the definition of leadership that was expressed by a North American sociologist: *Leadership is the ability to influence people so that they work enthusiastically toward the achievement of goals directed toward the common good and especially toward the good of the most needy members of society*. Indeed, in Vincentian spirituality, everything must be referred to the poor. Such was the case from the time of their origin and so now everything must lead inevitably

to the integral liberation of the poor. Events and the needs of the poor shaped and energized the various Vincentian institutions and ministries, so also today events and the needs of the poor continue to guarantee our fidelity to the true Vincentian spirit. According to Vincent's thinking and in accord with the thinking of all Vincentians today, nothing has meaning or significance apart from the poor. Everything becomes credible when viewed from the perspective of the poor and when viewed in light of the present situation of those who are poor.

Three basic principles of Vincent's leadership

When speaking of Vincent de Paul as a leader, the first thing we must do is investigate the roots and the source of that leadership. In other words, *from where* is Vincent's leadership derived. This is important because we should not forget that the source of leadership can be clear or obscure, it can originate from hidden interests or from ethical issues. We must also remember that Vincent de Paul was not the leader of an NGO or of a humanist/altruistic group. Vincent de Paul was a believer who made an irrevocable choice to follow Jesus Christ in and for the service of the poor.

That is why Vincent's leadership rests upon three fundamental principles. On several occasions Vincent referred to those principles when he stated: *This is my faith, this is my experience*. The principles are the following:

- A) *The primacy of God*:** Vincent experienced God as the one who brought him out of the land of Egypt, that is, the one who freed him from his ambitious, selfish and worldly attitude. Then God led Vincent through an exodus event (an event that was filled with doubt and many hesitations), to the promised land (to an option of total surrender and commitment). Vincent de Paul knew that he had arrived at this new place not by his own efforts, but by the guiding hand of God. Thus, Vincent was convinced that his leadership was not the result of his intelligence or of some strategy that he himself designed, but his leadership was a gift of God.

Vincent de Paul did not speak about *charism* (in fact, he never used that word), but he was aware of the fact that the institutions that he founded and the projects that he designed and carried out came from God. When asked about the origin of his works, he often answered: *I said to myself, "did you ever dream of founding a Company of Sisters? Oh no, not !! Was it Mlle Le Gras? Just as little". I can tell you the truth that I never thought of it*. That was Vincent's manner of referring to the charism that today, four hundred years later, we celebrate with much joy.

The great historian of French spirituality, Henri Bremond, summarized this principle in the following manner: *It was not the poor who brought Vincent de Paul to God, but it was God who led the poor to Vincent de Paul*.

- B) *Christ incarnated in the history suffering*:** Vincent de Paul became a saint, not an activist. Vincent de Paul and his followers made a *fundamental option for the poor*. That option was made from the perspective of an earlier option, namely, an option for Jesus Christ, the evangelizer and servant of the poor, *the man-for-others, the dispossessed, the servant, the servant in life and the servant in death*. It is, however, important to clarify that this is not a question of two separate and distinct options, but

rather two dimensions or two moments in one and the same option. Vincentian identity is Christocentric, and therefore its option for the poor can only be understood in light of the reality that the cause of the poor is the cause of Christ.

Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the leadership of Vincent de Paul is not to be seen as that of an individual who placed himself at the head of a political, social or merely humanistic organization. The leadership of Vincent de Paul is characterized by his radical following of Christ and responds to the principles that Christ left us: the grain of wheat must die in order to bear fruit, love to the extreme, lay down one's life for others, do the will of the Father, live as one who serves, be merciful as the Father ...

- C) The poor, God's incredible question:** Like Cain, so also Vincent is confronted by God's question: *where is your brother?* (Genesis 4:9). In order to respond to that question Vincent had to take a decisive step: his brothers and sisters, the poor, could not continue to be a statistic or "the dumping ground for nice sounding pietistic and ideological phrases". The poor had to become an essential part of Vincent's life, morality and faith ... they had to become his *dominant passion*. Therefore, on October 8, 1649, Vincent wrote to M. Almerás and stated: *the poor, who do not know where to go or what to do, who are suffering already and who increase daily, are my burden and my sorrow* (CCD:III:492).

Yes, this incredible question of God put into movement Vincent's leadership and he became involved in what he referred to as *God's business*, namely, the struggle for justice, the defense of the poor and making other people aware of the plight of the poor. That question, *where is your brother*, impelled Vincent to become the Good Samaritan.

A vital force and two inevitable convictions

The French philosopher, Henri Bergson, introduced a very famous expression into philosophical thinking, *élan vital*, which can be translated as *the vital force or impulse of life*.

The leader, Vincent de Paul, found this *vital force* in the strength of the Spirit... the Spirit that led him, that preserved him, that animated him. We refer to this vital force as Vincentian spirituality. Without that spirituality, Vincent's leadership would have become bureaucracy, propaganda and/or empty activism.

Vincent's spirituality is one of *open eyes*. In other words, a spirituality that Pope Francis described when he stated: *Let us open our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society! ... Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help!* (*Misericordiae Vultus*, #15). We are not talking about an abstract spirituality that is far removed from the suffering of the poor and the disinherited.

Indeed, we are referring to a spirituality of incarnation in the victims of the oppressive system, reaching out to the lowest members of society, commitment of disinterested service on behalf of those most abandoned and forgotten, missionary outreach in order to bring comfort, mercy and the Good News to the poor and needy.

At the same time, however, it must be noted that this vital force, this spirituality, led Vincent de Paul to two inevitable convictions. Vincent de Paul's leadership cannot be understood apart from a series of convictions that characterized his life and his works. Leaders in any area of life can do nothing unless they are imbued with certain convictions. Vincent de Paul was a leader with convictions.

Here we are going to highlight two convictions that are at the root of Vincent's life and commitment.

A) The poor, the sacrament of Christ – Using the language of the Second Vatican Council and of post-Conciliar theology, we could say that the poor are the sacrament of Christ, a real expression of Christ, the preferential place for an encounter with the crucified and suffering God.

These present day theological formulations would not have been expressed in that manner by Vincent de Paul. Nevertheless, it is clear that these concepts are part of the unique, living patrimony of Vincentian spirituality. These concepts are rooted in the twenty-fifty chapter of Saint Mathew's gospel: *whatever you did for ones of these least brothers/sisters of mine, you did for me* (Matthew 25:40).

Therefore, through the eyes of faith, Vincent discovered that the poor, before being the beneficiaries of his services and care, were first and foremost the visible presence of the crucified Lord in the midst of the world.

B) The poor, our lords and masters – Even though this expression did not originate with Vincent de Paul, nevertheless, Vincent's practical application of those words gave them a uniqueness that has been passed on to his followers. Because the poor are *the suffering image of Our Master*, they become *our lords and masters*. Therefore, Vincentians must love and serve the poor in the same way that they love and serve our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

From a sociological perspective, Vincent made a complementary application. From experience Vincent understood the relationship between master and servant. He knew that some aristocratic masters were frequently demanding, unjust, capricious and ungrateful. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases, their servants cared for them throughout their life, and even did so with a certain love.

Now, however, those masters, many times harsh, demanding, vulgar and ungrateful ... those masters are the poor and Vincentians are to be their servants (not in view of obtaining a salary nor out of fear). Rather Vincentians are to be their servants out of love and because with the eyes of faith they discover in those persons who are oppressed, a Christ who does not call them to ecstatic contemplation but calls them to effective service, love and solidarity.

The poor are constituted as our *lords and masters* because their situation and their needs reveal God's will to us. Furthermore, it is the poor who lead us to Jesus Christ.

Strengths of Vincent's leadership style

In addition to some basic elements and an incarnated spirituality as well as some firm convictions, every leader weaves his approach with certain strengths that, in some way, mold his personality and identity. In the case of Vincent de Paul those strengths would involve all the various circumstances, actions, events, signs... everything that had to do with the humanization process, the dignity, the promotion and the integral liberation of the poor, marginalized and disinherited. Here, however, we highlight the following:

- A) Reaching out to the world of the poor and the excluded** – When Vincent de Paul (in the words of Pope Francis) *touched the wounds of Christ in the wounds of the poor*, his life was totally changed and he became the leader of an evangelization project and a movement of humanizing liberation.

His involvement in a work on behalf of the poor flowed from the impact of the situation in which the poor found themselves. It is imperative to analyze and to become involved in the midst of the reality of the victims of unjust and inhuman systems. In the gospel parable, the Good Samaritan reached out to his “wounded and abused neighbor” and therefore, *he was moved to compassion* (Luke 10:30-36). Openness to the reality of the poor, understanding the world of inequality, deprivation and injustice and allowing that world to penetrate one's interior ... all of these are essential if we want to understand Vincent de Paul's leadership and also, if we want to understand the present day mission of all members of the Vincentian Family.

- B) The vision of reality understood from the perspective of God and at the same time with one's heart focused on God** – There is no doubt about the fact that the world is seen in a distinct manner when viewed from the peripheries than when viewed from the palaces of the rich, different when viewed from the mud and fenced in refugee centers than from the great avenues and the boardrooms of the directors of multinational corporations, different when viewed from those situations in which life is threatened than from those situations in which life is all comfort and ease. The mind and heart of Vincent de Paul were transformed when his eyes gazed upon and scrutinized life from the underside of history.

Vincent de Paul, however, became a leader when he looked at the world with the eyes of God, that is, with a gaze of mercy, tenderness and compassion. Vincent de Paul's gaze was not that of the sociologist or of the formal, legalistic cleric ... rather, it was the gaze of the Father who is moved by the reality of his children who are abandoned, forgotten and deprived of dignity.

- C) The deaconate of charity with a distinctive and characteristic seal** – When I use the phrase, *deaconate of service*, I am referring to the service of charity, the mission of charity or, as Vincent would say, the state of charity. In the deaconate of service, we find perfect union, charity, justice, mercy, service, sacrifice, the civilization of love, advocacy, humanness ...

The deaconate of charity gives unity and integrity to all Vincentian institutions and that same deaconate of charity distinguishes all Vincentian institutions and activities in the

church and in society. It is the characteristic seal that the leader, Vincent de Paul, imprinted on his surroundings. The Confraternities of Charity, with their distinctive name, became the first witnesses (in time and in space) to this deaconate of charity.

- D) Sensitivity as a fundamental attitude** – *To be a Christian and to see our brothers and sisters suffering without weeping with them, without being sick with them... that's to be lacking in charity; it's being a caricature of a Christian; it's inhuman; it's to be worse than animals (CCD:XII:222).* As a logical and natural effect of charity, Vincent highlights the element of sensitivity. Without sensitivity there is no openness to the poor nor is there any desire to approach them... without sensitivity there is no good news for the poor. On the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho, on that road which is the road of life, the lack of sensitivity makes us exploitive... makes us like the assailants, like the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan. On more than one occasion I have heard it said that we, as Vincentians, have to be experts in the area of social sensitivity... indeed, that is the challenge that Vincent has passed on to us.
- E) The organization of charity** – On Sunday, August 20th, 1617, in the village of Châtillon-les-Dombes (France), the pastor, Vincent de Paul, having witnessed the massive and generous charity of his parishioners as they assisted a poor, infirm family, stated: *there is great charity here but it is not well-organized.* His organization of the charitable activity of that village gave rise to the first of Vincent's institutions, namely, the Confraternity of Charity which is known today as the AIC, the International Association of Charity.

The coordinated organization of charity is the very heart of the Vincentian charism and mission. Such organization, however, ought to be bold and creative. John Paul II called for *a new creativity in charity (Novo Millennio Ineunte, #50)* ... a new and renewed charity for these new times. This new creativity in charity is demanded by the new situations and the new victims of the globalization of indifference. Good order in providing assistance and in the meticulous organization of charity were always great concerns of Vincent de Paul. That is clearly seen in the Rule for the Confraternity at Châtillon-les-Dombes which describes the objective of the Confraternity in the following words: *to assist spiritually and corporally the people of their town who have sometimes suffered a great deal, more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons (CCD:XIIIb:8).*

Vincent's strategy as a leader

If we were to ask Vincent about the means that he utilized in the exercise of his leadership on behalf of the poor, there is no doubt that he would respond with the phrase: *with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows (CCD:XI:32)* or as Vincent insisted: *all our work consists in action (CCD:XI:33).*

Vincent did not follow some manual on leadership nor did he act in accord with a specific strategy. As someone has pointed out, it could be said that in the mind of Vincent de Paul all legitimate means were appropriate for service and for the liberation of the poor. Nevertheless, we can point out some elements that Vincent utilized and developed in his exercise of leadership ... elements that are also relevant today.

- A) Empowerment of the person, especially women** – In order to carry out his mission, this element was most important. In other words, Vincent involved people in an active manner in the struggle against poverty... and he was especially mindful of the involvement of women. Vincent realized that he alone could not accomplish his plan with regard to the liberation of those persons who were poor. Therefore, he surrounded himself with people and instilled in them his spirit, his courage, his attitudes and his convictions. Furthermore, he established various groups that would continue his work. This empowerment and involvement was done in many different ways: through his letters and his conferences, through the Rules that he established for the Confraternities of Charity, through his advice and counsel...
- B) Knowing how to bring out the best in people** – Those persons who collaborated with Vincent de Paul were ordinary people, not heroes. Vincent, however, knew how to bring out the best in people; he convinced people that they could and should collaborate in carrying out his plans and he instilled in people strength, boldness and constancy. In the film, *Monsieur Vincent*, there is a scene in which Louise de Marillac speaks about her fears and her hesitations in carrying out the mission entrusted to her... Vincent responds: *you are strong and courageous and capable. I need you.*
- C) A movement from giving “a handout” to advocacy and prophetic denunciation and engagement in the struggle to change inhuman and unjust structures** – Vincent never looked down upon providing people with some form of immediate material assistance. Hunger, illness, physical and spiritual misery, social abandonment, war, unemployment, marginalization ... all of those realities impelled Vincent to organize assistance and relief. On one occasion he stated: *we are to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire* (CCD:XI:25). Vincent was convinced that there was always a need to provide assistance, but those efforts had to be organized. In that way he avoided covering over blatant injustices as well as simply providing people with “a hand out”.

Vincent complemented his “hand outs” with projects of social advocacy so that the poor themselves (individually and as a group) would become ever more conscious of their situation, their dignity, and their rights and thus, become protagonists of their own integral development.

Furthermore, Vincent prophetically denounced the injustices of his era and engaged in a process that changed existing inhuman structures. Among his actions we highlight here his public and radical opposition to the exploitive policies of the prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin... he asked him to resign his office. Vincent also spoke against certain governmental and ecclesiastical projects that deprived the poor of their freedom. In summary, Vincent’s defense of the dignity of the person became a fundamental building block in the construction of a new society.

- D) Boldness** – Vincent de Paul was a leader who did not want things to remain as they were, but sought change. He wanted to change the situation of the poor. Therefore, his establishments, his plans and his activity reveal his daring, his courage and his boldness. He did not hesitate to engage in new and innovative projects... projects that were, in a certain sense, revolutionary. He also did not hesitate to establish various institutions: the

Confraternity of Charity and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. In those establishments, women became the protagonists and the instruments who became involved in the struggle for respect with regard to the dignity of the poor. All of that occurred at a time when women were excluded from participation in the Church and in society. At the time of the establishment of the Confraternities, Vincent stated: *for eight hundred years or so, women have had no public role in the Church... but now divine Providence is turning today to some of you to supply what was lacking to the sick poor* (CCD:XIIIb:432).

In the Vincentian language, *boldness* refers to zeal, to the fire that enkindles, illuminates and consumes those who possess it. Vincent highlighted that reality when he stated: *if love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray... zeal prompts us to rise above all sorts of difficulties, not only by the power of reason, but also by the power of grace* (CCD:XII:250).

- E) Creativity** – Vincent was a leader who not only emphasized boldness, but also was very creative. If there is anything that should not be part of a leader’s personality, then it is routine, apathy, and laziness.

Vincent was very aware of the evils that resulted from laziness and routine. He saw those evils revealed in an ignorant and bourgeois clergy, in men who were more eager to advance in their clerical career than to engage in a process of reform and renewal. He also saw those evils revealed in a Church that was closed in upon itself and attached to power and money. In light of the experience of Jesus Christ, the passionate servant of the poor, Vincent engaged in a daring search for new methods, new forms and new expressions of service. His leadership provides us with a very concrete lesson: service on behalf of the poor demands a change of attitude that enables one to move beyond “doing things as they have always been done”.

- F) Discernment** – In addition to being a faithful, radical and committed Christian, Vincent was also a clear and intelligent leader. Vincent was not impulsive or given to uncontrolled emotional outbursts. Rather he analyzed and reflected on the signs of the times and then he attacked the root causes of unjust situations. In other words, Vincent engaged in a process of discernment. That process led Vincent to state: *we live on the sweat of the poor* (CCD:XI:190); therefore, we have to seek that which is best for those persons who are poor, for our lords and masters.

I have always been struck by the perspicacity of Vincent de Paul in all his works and projects. He could be wrong, but he was never fooled by first impressions or by the attractiveness of false and misleading projects. The situation with regard to the General Hospital can be seen as a paradigm of the serious discernment that Vincent engaged in as he served the poor. At a time when all his collaborators were delighted and excited about this project of the Hospital, Vincent de Paul discovered and felt that this was not the best thing for the poor and that the project would lead to the repression and the condemnation of the poor.

G) Permanent and on-going formation – Vincent de Paul became aware of a reality that, today, seems very evident: without formation, there can be no quality service nor change of attitude with regard to our relationship with the poor. We need only begin to read the Rule of the first Confraternities of Charity and we become immediately aware of that fact. In that Rule, Vincent insisted upon an integral formation: human, Christian, professional...

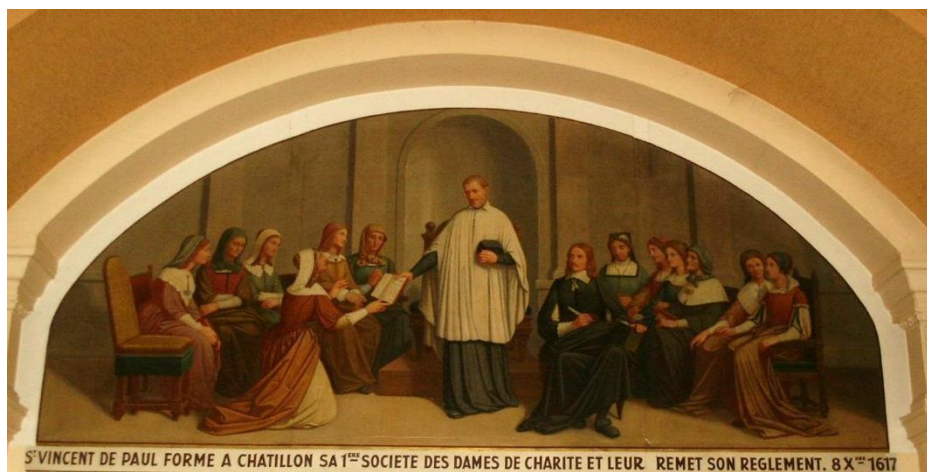
Because we must provide quality service to the poor, it becomes absolutely necessary that we are open to on-going formation as well as spiritual development (which in turn provides a dynamic to our “being” and our “doing”). This openness should include a willingness to acquire a greater understanding about the world of the poor and about the social environment in which they live. At the same time, we must constantly renew and up-date our methods and forms of service.

A final word

Nobody denies that Vincent is a leader for our era. We, however, as the followers of this leader, have to ask ourselves some questions. For example, do we follow this radical and demanding leader or as time has passed, do we find it difficult to follow in Vincent’s footsteps? Through our actions on behalf of the poor, through our pastoral approach and through our methods, do we reveal Vincent as a living and relevant leader? Do we take as a given the fact that Vincent is a leader and then on the practical level forget about that reality? Bob Dylan, in one of his songs, stated: *the answer is blowing in the wind...* on this occasion, however, the answer is in each one of us.

F. CELESTINO FERNÁNDEZ, C. M.

Note: The citations from Saint Vincent de Paul come from the English edition of his Works Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conference, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-13b), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11-12); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2009, volume IX, p. 165, 192. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:IX:165, 192.



The History of AIC

Alicia Duhne, International President, and the AIC Past Presidents

Introduction – Alicia Duhne

Continuing with our program, let me present to you our former presidents who will narrate the history of the AIC. Some of you might not know these individuals, so let me present:

- Patricia Nava (President from 1994-2002)
- Anne Sturm (President from 2002-2005)
- Marina Costa (President from 2005-2009)
- Laurence de la Brosse (President from 2009-2015)

We also have in the Assembly Hall, Marianne Chevalier, who held the position of Secretary- General from 1994-2002 and is presently President of AIC Solidarity ... she continues to make a great contribution to the AIC. I would also ask the following former Secretary-Generals and the present Director of the Secretariat to please stand:

- Marta Esser (Secretary General from 1985-1994) who continues to support our Vincentian work, especially in the area of translation and through her contacts with the former members of the Executive Committee.
- Angés Dandois (Secretary General from 2002-2009) who, week after week, continues to support us through her service as Coordinator of Projects in AIC Solidarité.
- Natalie Monteza (Secretary General from 2009 to 2014) who is unable to be with us.
- Tayde de Callatay (Director of the Secretariat since 2014) who has been a great support for me.

In chronological order, we will listen first to the history of the AIC from 1617-1995. Then, each of the former presidents will give a brief summary of the work of the AIC during the time that they held office.



AIC's first steps (1617-1994) – Marianne Chevalier:

We are going to present AIC's history in 5 steps:

- St Vincent's strike of genius: the Confraternities of Charity, 1617-1660
- The difficulties during the French Revolution, 1789-1815, followed by the turning point in 1815, when Mr Etienne, CM, restarted the Charities
- 19th Century: Industrialisation, immigration
- 20th Century: up to Vatican II
- AIC from 1971-2017

We will see all of this through:

- The historical context
- The actions that have evolved as poverty has changed
- The sources of inspiration of the Charities/of AIC

The first step:

It all started on 20th August 1617 in Chatillon-les-Dombes in France, with a call from Vincent de Paul during the Sunday homily. He had arrived just one month earlier and on that Sunday in August 1617, he was preparing Mass when he was informed that a local family was living in extreme poverty: everyone was sick and abandoned.

And from that afternoon on, when he went to visit them himself, he noticed that a procession of women had been bringing them supplies of food and clothing.

Saint Vincent realised that this charity had to be organised, and so he wrote a First Rule, which he gave to the women he had gathered together on 23rd August.

The First Confraternity of Charity was born to "assist the poor corporally and spiritually".

The Charities were groups of lay women, who worked in teams and, met each month and were supported by a spiritual reflection in groups.

The sources of inspiration were: the Gospel and the life of Christ – making the Good News a reality in words and deeds.

From 1617 to 1660, when St Vincent died, there was an extraordinary development of the Confraternities, in France and in Europe. Even back then we can speak about internationality!

In 1625, there were Charities in 30-40 parishes in the lands of the Gondi family.

Indeed the Charities, the first organisations founded by Saint Vincent, developed with the support of the other organisations he founded: the Fathers of the Mission, founded in 1625, then with Louise de Marillac, who became the first Coordinator of the Charities in 1629, he founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633: the Daughters and the Ladies completed each other.

Their actions responded to the forms of poverty at the time:

- Home visits to the poor and sick (1617)
- Support to the victims of the famine of 1629, the plague of 1630, the war of 1635
- The hospital for abandoned children (1638)

The **second step** took place at the time of the French Revolution in 1789. It was a dark time in France, full of trouble, violence and attacks on the Church and its institutions. The Charities disappeared or worked in the shadows. In 1815, Mr Etienne, a Father of the Mission in France, took it upon himself to bring the Charities back to life.

Step Three: 19th century: In Europe; it was the great age of industrialisation. People from the countryside came to towns looking for work, migration occurred within Europe and towards the New Continent. Entire populations were obliged to immigrate.

The Church reacted: Pope Léon XIII published the social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. It was the beginning of what we call today the Social Doctrine of the Church. This encyclical responded to the demands of Christians who were concerned about social justice.

The Charities continued their work with the poorest: home visits, supporting families, children, the elderly, migrants, etc.

The Fathers of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity accompanied the migrations and founded new charities in Lebanon, the USA, Mexico, Portugal and Syria.

Step Four: 20th century: For AIC in the 20th century, there is a before and after Vatican II.

The beginning of the century was marked by two world wars in 1914 and 1939. In all the countries, the Charities continued their home visits, support to war victims and resistance to dictatorships.

New Charities were born in Bolivia, Spain, Honduras, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, the Philippines and El Salvador. A common spirit united all the Charities across the world. At that time there were 20 national associations. Each was autonomous.

The President of the French charities was the International President, she was in contact by letter with the other associations and visits between countries took place. There was no elected international board or constitution, the Superior of the Congregation of the Mission was the Director General. The first international congresses were organised.

In civil society and in the Church there were big developments, in the context of the creation of large international organisations. The Catholic Church realised the significance of internationalisation and recognised the importance of the place of lay people in the Church.

In 1910, WUCWO, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations was created. In 1920 saw the creation of the Conference of International Catholic Organisations. European volunteers were involved in these organisations. There was also the establishment of the Society of Nations in 1919 and the UN in 1945, which aimed to maintain peace.

The Vatican Council II shook things up! It produced two important texts, *Gaudium et Spes* and the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, which would be sources of inspiration and change for the Charities.

A big innovation: lay people became responsible for their own organisations.

The main ideas were as follows:

- The promotion of justice and social action, “reading the signs of the times”
- The importance of the international dimension
- The place of women in the Church
- The essential need to train Christians

The volunteers followed these debates and steps forward with enthusiasm.

Step Five: 1971: The Charities become AIC

In 1968, the new Superior General of the Fathers of the Mission, Father Richardson, was very much in favour of the modernisation and independence of the Charities.

3 delegates from the Charities were invited to the General Assembly of the Fathers of the Mission in July 1969 in Rome, where they presented their project of an international association of lay women who were totally responsible for their association.

A lot of preparatory work followed this meeting...

In October 1971, an Assembly of Delegates met in Rome. A Constitution was voted on and the Assembly elected an International Board and a President: Claire Delva. AIC was born. The mission of AIC was defined in the Constitution, and it's this same mission that we follow today.

Article 1 of the Constitution: “Fight against all forms of poverty and exclusion, through transformative initiatives and projects. Denounce injustices, put pressure on infrastructures and decision-makers in order to fight against the causes of poverty.”

Today AIC carries out social and pastoral action and a mission of the Church, that of evangelising and being at the service of those living in poverty.

Its sources of inspiration are:

- The thinking of Saint Vincent
- The Social Doctrine of the Church
- The AIC volunteers at grassroots level during Assemblies and seminars and the Executive Board

In 1981 the “AIC Basic Document” was published, an essential tool for all the volunteers. This document has just been updated for our 400th anniversary, under the name of the AIC Charter, we will come back to this later.

Since 1971, 27 new associations have been created, today there are 53 national AIC associations.

From 1971 to 1994, AIC went a long way in adapting its actions to the needs of people living in poverty.

We implemented:

- **Participation** (1976): moving from each person finding the solution to his or her own problems to community life

- **Solidarity** (1985): Solidarity means co-responsibility, fraternity and participation, between volunteers and with those living in poverty
- **Self-promotion** (1990): The First Operational Guidelines were voted on in Assisi: Self-promotion, solidarity, training and communication (this concept of self-promotion came from volunteers in Latin America who from their experience had the conviction that those living in poverty have the right to participate in their development).

1994 is the year that Patricia de Nava was elected President at the Assembly in Guatemala. She will now take the floor with the other international Past Presidents.

Patricia de Nava (1994-2002)

INTRODUCTION

AIC, one road, one path, one history. Initiatives, realities and dreams, ideals, lines of action, attitudes, people and wishes interlink to give shape to today's AIC. I will talk about the period I have lived through, when I had the privilege of being the president, encouraged by two exceptional women, Claire Delva and Dilde Grandi, who have left an indelible mark, not just on me but on the association as a whole.

When I took on the leadership of the Association in 1994, we had a committed, lively AIC, full of energy, questions and hopes, with lines of action directed towards prioritising solidarity and self-help, arousing huge enthusiasm among AIC Volunteers. These volunteers, aware of the importance of their role in the world and the power of belonging to a great association, influenced us with their enthusiasm and gave us the strength and drive needed to move forward with a vision of the future.

TRAINING

Continuous training has been a constant theme, to which those of us forming the Presidency, the Executive Board, the International Secretariat and the delegates' team devote much effort. Visits have been increased, always with a training aspect included. Documents, international newsletters, seminars and workshops focus on strengthening the operational lines, public relations, the international reach and **above all** the work, in the form of projects, where we reinforce the importance of the team as well as evaluation, not just quantitative but also qualitative and forward-looking. Worksheets and training booklets on spiritual, Vincentian and technical subjects were produced. The awareness of belonging to AIC was promoted, with participative leadership and training for multiplier agents to be generators of social change, in a prophetic and Vincentian sense.

The lines of action, "**Towards a Culture of Solidarity and Self-Help**", train Volunteers to succeed in developing a new society, where the excluded can be protagonists, a culture in which authentic Christian love, freedom, justice, solidarity and hope are an integral part of the cultural heritage. (Self-help letter, art. 11)

The Cultural Transformation Policy led AIC to step forward **from the local to the global**, undertaking concerted action against poverty of all kinds. It trained and enabled volunteers to be multiplier agents of good news in a world looking for hope, giving ethical, doctrinal and formative guidance, not just as proposals, but also for implementation and monitoring.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Representatives team promoted external communications, bridging the local with the global. Within the Association, the importance of direct contact with the volunteers, who are the foundation of AIC, was emphasised, to strengthen the work of the base groups, their actions, their training and reflection process, their direct contact with those in need, as active subjects, the beginning and end of our actions. The Contact Letters, sent not only to presidents but also to the AIC volunteers across the whole world, appeared, along with the AIC-INFO, the use of e-mail, the first, embryonic webpage and a database was started which could be constantly kept up to date.

The “**Expansion and Creation of New Groups Policy**” was a priority. It placed great importance on the visits, which enabled direct contact for volunteers with the president, members of the Executive Committee and the International Secretariat. 41 countries across four continents were visited, a remarkable task for the four vice-presidents.

In 1971, AIC had 20 associations, 11 of them in emerging countries. At the end of the term of office, we already had 50 associations, 41 in poorer countries, a great blessing and a huge challenge. We were no longer an “**association for the poor**”, **we had converted ourselves into an “association of the poor”**. (Marianne’s report)

At the initiative of Claire Delva, the Foresight Group began, which subsequently began the **Image Group**, responsible for **Operation Visibility**, created to examine the financial problems of AIC and collaborate in resolving them, in order to promote the image and position of AIC both within and outside the organisation.

WOMEN AND POVERTY

As regards the topic of Women and Poverty, always a priority for AIC, the prevention and combating of violence against women is at the forefront. Regional seminars with the theme of “**Women, Violence and Prevention**” were held in Europe and Latin America, leading to cascade multiplication. Via national to local associations, the contents gave rise to numerous meetings, seminars and workshops, with publication in newsletters.

A statement of intent was written and signed after the Latin American seminar, and widely distributed, including via the internet.

FIGHT FOR JUSTICE AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

During this period, priority was given to the **condemnation of injustice and action on structures**, emphasising our prophetic mission, our commitment to the other, the desire to transform the world, with deep respect for cultures, so that those living in poverty occupy the place in the world that is right for them as Children of God. We focus on imbuing into the hearts of our volunteers that poverty is not just a casual phenomenon but is the product of unjust political, social and economic situations, and therefore needs to be attacked.

Political actions were promoted, with education for citizenship, civic and transformative commitment. These lines of action drove us to adopt a radical position. We did not restrict ourselves to doing

charitable work, not to projects aimed at the development of individuals and communities; we also had to commit ourselves to carrying out transformative actions for establishment of a culture of solidarity, fairness and fraternity, founded on human, ethical, civil and gospel values. We proposed **transforming poverties and transforming society, thus generating a culture of friendship, a cultural charity**. In order to evangelise cultures and inculturate the Gospel, we had to be part of a shared process of **analysis, reflection, dialogue and action**.

RELATIONS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL VINCENTIAN FAMILY

Faithful to the intentions of our founder, who formed us to work in collaboration and to achieve greater impact in the fight against poverty and its causes, we strengthened relations with the Vincentian Family. AIC took an active and positive role from the start in the meetings organised by the then Superior General of the Mission, Fr Robert P. Maloney, C.M. It was represented at international and national meetings of the various branches, especially the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

These relationships, direct and on-line contact with directors and national spiritual advisers, had a positive effect with the formation of new AIC associations and groups, with the training offered by AIC and the Spiritual Advisers' document being highly valued, later on adopted and adapted by other branches of the Vincentian Family. Over the years, AIC's Priority Lines of Action were included among the strategies proposed by the Commission for promoting Systemic Change.

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

The Institutional Strengthening Process began with a questionnaire sent to national presidents, generating a participative process, planned for the whole of AIC. The data produced were included in a report, with very specific data, graphs and statistics. A SWOT analysis was then carried out (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). The **AIC Institutional Document** was produced, based on these results, together with several documents intended to define and publicise the mission, vision and values that inspire AIC's action: Action plan, schedule, flow chart, Executive Committee Procedures Manual, Participatory finance plan.

An important step in the strengthening of the association was the move of the International Secretariat offices from Brussels to Louvaine-La-Neuve, managed by our Secretary General, Marianne Chevalier. This helped to strengthen the association's image and reputation, leading to the Doctorate Honoris Causa, awarded to AIC for its commitment to the poor, women and society, and to the defence of the rights of excluded persons. This change of headquarters began a process of professionalising the association, driven by its insertion into the university environment.

AIC, OUR COMMON HOME

I conclude the review of this stage in the life of AIC, with a message that comes from the bottom of my heart. I wish to speak of AIC as a second "Common Home" for all volunteers. A home where we may echo the words of Pope Francis: LS No. 86 "*...countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other*".

I'd like to reach the heart of each of you present here who live and shape our association, so that together we contribute to make our association a place inspired by the earliest Christian communities, breathing fraternity, love and harmonious relationships. A space where an authentic commitment to peace reigns, where each volunteer feels welcomed and respected, where she can develop as a person, feeling the support and respect of her group, a space with no internal conflict, full of light, harmony and peace. My dream is that our brothers and sisters, seeing the peace that reigns among us, will be influenced themselves and also make their world and their surroundings a place of peace.

Anne Sturm (2002-2005)

When Patricia came to the end of her mandate, she had given invaluable service to AIC, while we had to start with new Operational Guidelines, to be put into practice worldwide and at all levels of AIC: **Social Co-responsibility, Institutional Development and Empowerment – a challenge for the new Board, which was called to encourage AIC volunteers to turn these words into action.**

1) Institutional Development: As Patricia mentioned, the new millennium was a time of important changes: The implementation of new information technology. AIC's Website was reworked and the Bulletin turned from paper to electronic. What first was meant as a means of saving money turned out to be a means of spreading the message faster, more easily and much more widely.

Communication took speed: The Internet came to the grass-roots. At the end of my mandate there was only one Member Association without e-mail. Once again, AIC volunteers demonstrated readiness to learn, to try new things, to be inventive and they were ready to share their knowledge with the poor.

Communication gained a new quality – it became up to date and detailed. AIC was able to listen to the grass-roots volunteers and in fact there was so much they had to share. For now my vision is that all member associations create their own website - it is possible: Let us take initiative here in Châtillon!

One of the results of this new quality of communication was **twinning**, which already existed, but now reached a new level: that of a better organized, mutual and qualified partnership and here again, our Anniversary could provide new ideas.

Visits to member Associations continued, we promoted teamwork and offered training and sometimes we were troubleshooters. However training was mutual and never in my life have I learned as much as I did meeting volunteers from all continents: The indigenous woman from Vietnam talking about violence in her family: I see her face whenever violence against women is at stake. I will never forget either the deep spirituality I encountered in Mozambique. And I learned: Every single volunteer all over the world is important and contributes to the great work of St. Vincent. And there were new countries contributing to the cultural and human wealth of AIC.

A growing Association and closer relations of course required better financing. **Fundraising** became an important issue at all levels. And again AIC pursued its strategy: To search for information, to learn, to have small teams working on the issue, sharing their knowledge within AIC, and at the same time ensuring closer relations with donors and funding institutions and better presentation of what we are, what we do and why.

2) Empowerment: fostering the right and the capacity especially of women to make use of their own resources to instigate personal and social change via capacity building, communication, and access to information.

When we look back at what I said about communication, twinning, visits to member associations and fundraising, it is evident that all of these are very concrete means of contributing to personal empowerment by sharing values and experience, and to the Association by making it better known, greater, more powerful and more efficient. The world moves together and so do we, working as a team, networking and sharing responsibility, work and reflections, allowing in the same way steadiness, reliability and renovation.

3) Social co-responsibility: The consequence of an increasing awareness of mutual interdependency within communities, countries and in the world. Based on empowerment and institutional development, social co-responsibility became a challenge for AIC on all levels: To change the lives of the poor, we decided to speak out against injustice and discrimination: locally through participation in networks because poverty is local, nationally through advocacy and campaigns, raising public awareness e.g. on violence against women, and internationally through the commitment of AIC representatives accredited to the UN, the Council of Europe, the Church and civil society organizations, and through volunteers who for example spoke on the situation of refugees in the **Council of Europe**.

Thanks to the relentless work of Andrée Thomanek, in 2003 **Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC** was granted to AIC, enforcing collaboration with UN Bodies such as the CSW (Commission on the Status of Women) where AIC representatives collaborate actively in committees and commissions, valued for their firsthand testimonies on poverty affecting women. At UNESCO they insisted that informal learning became part of the budget.

At the 2005 NGO Conference in New York, Cruz Maria de Leon from the Dominican Republic spoke on **“Voices for Peace: Violence against women – a violation of Human Rights and Dignity”** and in 2004 Rose de Lima Ramanankavana from Madagascar spoke on **“Children and the Millennium Development Goals: Eradicating extreme Poverty and Hunger”**. And there was an impact - of course no presentation changes the world – but before Nkiru Aruno from AIC Nigeria gave her workshop at UNESCO on the deplorable situation of widows, this issue had not been on the radars of international bodies. Now it is and it was only some years later that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated *“The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda with its pledge to leave no one behind has a particular resonance for widows, who are among the most marginalized and isolated.”*

The Millennium Development Goals opened a worldwide discussion on what the most important goals for the human community to achieve are and AIC volunteers felt it concerned themselves and had to do with the poverty they had experienced.

The **Social Doctrine of the Church**, presented by Father Bob Maloney in 1999, became one of the pillars of AIC with its most important statement: ***“A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person”***.

Finally the 2011 UN NGO Conference in Bonn with the active participation of AIC and Rose's presentation on **Civic Engagement and Sustainable Development – the Role of Voluntary action for achieving Sustainability paved the way for what we are discussing today**. AIC representatives were

part of the commission drafting the papers at the end of the Conference, presented to the governments in Rio, cornerstones on the way to the Sustainable Development Goals.

And in fact the Sustainable Development Goals do concern us: Women's Rights, Decent Work, Sustainable Cities, Affordable and Clean Energy – all of them **important issues for AIC grass-roots volunteers as the poor are affected most by environmental damage.**

Political action takes time, needs commitment and enthusiasm, as well as **feedback and support from all of AIC worldwide.** We, AIC – and this is our strength and wealth – speak based on the experience of 150 000 grass-roots volunteers, who know about discrimination, poverty and violence from firsthand experience. That is why the international representatives need you and you need the international level to bring up the sufferings of the poor, **and you will be heard.**

Our values date back to 1617, our mission has developed over the centuries, our challenge is to respond to the needs of today, our tools are to be the latest and most efficient, and our vision is the vision of a better tomorrow.

Let me close with the words Pope Francis gives us at the end of his Encyclical: ***God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him!***

Marina Costa (2005-2009)

1. ATTEND TO THE WOMEN

Our everyday presence on the ground is one of the pillars of the Vincentian Project and a vital requirement of our service as volunteers. From the beginning of the association, this attentive presence allows us to experience at close hand the feminization of poverty, affecting not only women, but society as a whole.

Day to day contact of AIC volunteers with so many women and the conditions of extreme poverty in which many of them live, lead us to take up a position with regard to poverty that is far from a simply theoretical and intellectual one, but instead is a concrete, participative and constructive position. We are convinced that *women must have the opportunities to develop their own abilities, discover and develop their strengths, in order to ensure progress in society as a whole.*

Since 1975, AIC has been especially committed to supporting women, and since 1997 to combating violence against women.

Between 2005 and 2009, specific training was available for AIC members, so that they could undertake not only to provide palliative care but also to offer transformative responses. At the same time, a number of different actions were implemented, offering both affirmation and challenge. These included:

- Many practical projects for women in trouble, placing particular emphasis on the participation of the recipients,

- Launch of an AIC-wide, shared message on the theme of “Women and poverty”, the purpose of which was **to promote the joint responsibility of society as a whole for women living in poverty**
- **An international campaign against violence** towards women, proposed by AIC International and taken up by many national associations that undertook powerful awareness-raising and pressure group actions.
- **Global events on 25 November**, international Day for Eradication of Violence against Women
- **Creation of a prize** intended to stimulate and give financial support to AIC groups around the world who engage in the fight against violence against women, through innovative projects. This prize bears the name of **Jean and Claire Delva**. (PHOTO)
- An Assembly (2007) to explore this theme in depth, entitled “**Women and poverty in cultural diversity**”. This meeting convinced us that while cultural aspects often cause poverty, they can also be converted into challenges, and act as the starting point for sustainable development.
- In 2009, at the Mexico Assembly, we affirmed that, with the active commitment of everyone, “**We women can change the world**”, in the conviction that every woman, volunteer or beneficiary, has the ability to evolve, and make her own culture evolve.

Many projects born in those years, feeding back to base groups, showed us how the stimulus and formation of AIC comes truly reaches to the grassroots, making them stronger, giving both volunteers and beneficiaries greater motivation, so they feel valued, supported by the international association and have a greater awareness of their dignity and the important part they can play in society.

2. SOCIAL STRATEGIES

At the same Assembly in Mexico in 2009, the importance of being able to implement social strategies was also highlighted.

We are working on the issue of **discrimination against women** and how to deal with it, and we recognise that we often try to respond to a social phenomenon using personal strategies: but to achieve real change we need to broaden our strategies, moving on from individual or single group responses to adopt social strategies that could achieve structural change.

AIC passed on the fruits of this reflection to the base groups, giving them the strength which comes from the support of an international body to apply pressure **at every level, aware that** each team, within its own environment, has the task of being “representative”, and must take action to raise awareness and apply pressure on the authorities and institutions in its own country, thus making the most of the strength of the AIC network.

A third area which saw much development during those years was that of training:

3. TAKING THE LEAD IN OUR OWN TRAINING

Training has always been a feature of AIC’s path since its foundation, leading to deeper reflection on the daily aspects of Vincentian service, suggesting methods, organising seminars and providing

information and formation on the topics debated at an international level, in a “**never-ending process**”, as AIC says.

One aspect which I see as important to highlight is that over the years, the need for training began to appear not just as a suggestion and stimulus from AIC to the groups, but as a **powerful requirement coming from the base groups**. Many project reports highlighted the importance for volunteers to be well-trained. On the one hand, AIC’s **Priority Lines of Action** stated that each volunteer can *contribute to creating the conditions favourable to the personal development of people in need, supporting them in constructing their life plan and engaging in awareness-raising and application of pressure*.

While at the same time, **the concrete experience of the groups** showed that providing this integral support is a great responsibility requiring of us that each volunteer has continuing, focused training.

Continuing training is not just about increasing our technical knowledge, or about taking courses or reading many books and documents, it is much more than that: it asks for strength and a personal undertaking to acquire a way of being, a style of living and service consistent with the spirit of Saint Vincent. There is no training without the personal choice, the commitment and the effort made by each one of us. **Every volunteer must take the lead in his or her own training.**

Another area to which AIC devoted much attention was the technical training of base groups in project planning: starting with the initial documents from Marianne Chevalier, and the 2001 paper “Initiation into project working” by Patricia de Nava, times for specific training were provided in all visits and Assemblies.

In 2... **AIC Solidarité** was founded, devoted to on-going training of volunteers in methods of working on projects, and supporting various projects in emerging countries.

Over the years, we moved from case study training booklets to shorter, outline worksheets. Special attention was also given to spiritual worksheets, brought together in cycles: “On the road with Saint Vincent”, and “Change with Saint Vincent”, aiming to provide a practical tool for meetings of base groups.

4. SETTING OUT ON THE ROAD TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE (2007)

In 2007, AIC produced the first Training booklet on Systemic Change.

The Systemic Change method involves looking at each situation of poverty from a global perspective, and identifying the links between the various elements of each system, to see how to act or react in order to achieve the objective of positive change.

Systemic change teaches us that everything we have is a resource, and that every relationship between parts could be important to initiate change in a situation.

It does not so much matter what we do, as how we do it. Every project, including urgent ones, needing our immediate attention, can be transformative, depending on how we do it. What matters is not so much the personal point of view, but to look at the system as a whole and ask what I can do to initiate not just personal change but change of the entire system.

The Vincentian Family created a Commission to examine and present this method and enable its application in specific actions. Patricia de Nava represented AIC on this Commission, which is still in existence and work, and Rose de Lima represents AIC there.

Both AIC and the Vincentian Family Commission have made a major commitment to this method, but we are aware that many AIC groups continue to have problems applying Systemic Change to their own work and situation. There remains, therefore, the challenge of developing this technique still further, given the added value the Systemic Change method can give to our actions and projects.

All these topics (advances) of which we are speaking challenge us greatly, but as members of AIC, we know that challenge is a major part of our volunteering activity: it helps us stay committed, active and fresh, strengthening our will and giving us new enthusiasm every day.

Laurence de la Brosse (2009-2015)

Let's start with a brief recollection. At the start of her presentation, Patty showed you a photo of the international assembly held in Guatemala in 1994; that's where I found AIC; there were eight of us team members in the French delegation.

We came home inspired by AIC, admiring the commitment and energy of the volunteers, the depths of reflection and the thorough training: in short, we realised the strength of the AIC to which we belonged.

This first experience has strengthened in me over the years, and I am going to expand here on 3 of AIC's strong points:

- Continuous reflection to ensure our actions are truly transformative.
- A spiritual path in the Church, for mission.
- The power of a network in space and time.

Continuous reflection to ensure our actions are truly transformative:

AIC offers us the objective of being a transformative Christian force in society.

And we do this by "taking action together against poverty in all its forms".

Taking action against poverty means working locally with people in need, to put in place actions to transform their lives – actions which bring real and sustainable change in their lives.

And at the same time, it means being involved in political programmes, in public life or civil society, and collaborating with the other networks around the world.

Patty, Anne and Marina have shown us the path AIC has followed since 1994 to help volunteers accompany people in need in a respectful, participatory way:

AIC's lines of action in turn have emphasised participation, self-help, co-responsibility, empowerment (allowing each person to develop their own potential) and systemic change.

And as Marina reminded us, AIC, attentive to the signs of the times, has been very aware of the feminisation of poverty.

This new challenge has particularly affected our mainly female association.

When over 70% of the poorest people are women, how can we restore them to their rightful place in society?

In 2009, the international assembly in Mexico highlighted one of the causes of poverty for women: the **discrimination** from which they suffer.

This discrimination begins very early: from primary school age, boys actually have more chance of going to school than do girls.

So it is entirely natural that since the AIC 2011 assembly, we have chosen to examine in more depth the subject of Education as a means of preventing poverty for women.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March 2013, Olivier De Schutter, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, observed:

"The more education women receive, and the more their rights are recognised, the less likely it is their children will be hungry".

The Lines of Action for 2011, 2013 and 2015 concentrated on **Education as a means of preventing poverty for women**.

AIC's objective is to teach women how to develop themselves, to become aware of their own potential, making themselves better understood, building fair and equal relationships, gaining appointment to positions of responsibility more often within local, regional and national bodies.

In short, to help women to be aware that with THEIR HELP, the world can become a fairer place.

On 3 and 4 November last year, our president, Alicia, attended the International Forum of official partner NGOs of UNESCO in Queretaro, Mexico.

The chosen theme was: "from promotion to building Peace with NGOs"; education emerged as a powerful means for building peace and for development.

Alicia introduced 4 AIC projects in Latin America. Creative activities intended for children, but with the participation of parents, especially mothers, in city districts with high levels of violence in society. The work is carried out together with public authorities and other local organisations, and the children learn to dream about a world very different from the one where they live.

These 4 projects can be seen on the AIC website.

AIC offers a personal SPIRITUAL PATH for mission

Geneviève Grangy, former international president, recently said to me "*AIC offers a way of finding a personal balance between one's desire to engage in life as a citizen (doing something to make the world a fairer place) and one's spiritual life.*"

As AIC volunteers, with our various languages and cultures, we are united in a common project:

Paying attention to those most in need, as Saint Vincent de Paul did, in faith in Jesus Christ, servant of the poor.

The 1st encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI is called Deus Caritas Est [God is Love] (last year was the 10th anniversary of its publication). In paragraph 31, the Pope Emeritus wrote:

“When caring for people who suffer, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient.

*Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations... need a “**formation of the heart**”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others.”*

AIC understands the need for this formation of the heart. It has often appeared in the lines of action: in 2013 we chose: “The need to strengthen spiritual, ethical and Vincentian training”.

Spiritual direction for AIC groups is often provided by Daughters of Charity or Vincentian Fathers. It is essential to ensure that AIC groups retain the Vincentian character of our mission; and we are very grateful to all those sisters and priests who walk the path with us (it is likely that in future we will be inspired to train lay Vincentians in spiritual direction).

The preparation for the 400th anniversary has been a great opportunity, one might even call it a grace, for AIC.

There have been 3 stages:

- 2013 and 2014, re-acquaintance with the project of St Vincent, to interiorise it. Fr Eli Chavez, our international chaplain at the time, invited us to be subjugated, “amazed” by Saint Vincent.
- 2015 and 2016: proclaim what gives us life, the AIC charter was redefined
- 2017: Celebrating together with the friends of St Vincent,

And 2017 is not a final goal, we are now looking ahead to 2117, towards 500 years in our common home: (Throughout AIC’s history, we have seen how the thinking of the Church nourishes AIC’s own reflection).

It is true that AIC offers us a spiritual path, but the development of our spiritual life is focused on our mission: providing spiritual and practical support for people in need.

It has always been a challenge to provide spiritual support: now more than ever, the question remains, how do we provide spiritual support?

We could say, like Saint Pope John Paul II: how can we be “sparks” for our contemporaries searching for meaning?

In the midst of global upheaval, AIC can disseminate the values we have always held:

Simplicity, humility and charity; each one is always worth revisiting, to be understood thoroughly and lived out.

These values must be the life of our groups; people in need are very sensitive to the atmosphere around them, the least disagreement in a group affects them.

These people who often live in a violent world want to find peace and serenity with us.

In our times, Vincentian values have become a real necessity: let us dare to live them and proclaim them.

AIC: THE STRENGTH OF A NETWORK in space and time:

150,000 volunteers around the world, united by the same project of St Vincent for 400 years: what a force!

AIC International is there to coordinate the work, share experiences, link people together, answer questions, give a vision. And this is team work: the president is always in contact with the Secretary General – I have had the opportunity of working with Nathalie Monteza , then Tayde de Callataÿ, with the past president, Marina , advice from all bodies, members of the EB and the secretariat; I can't name them all but it is good that we work together.

We have already spoken about the need for training among volunteers. Recent years have been marked by the Diplomado AIC. Since 2010, the Diploma for AIC members has been in preparation. I can tell you it has been a tough journey, but thanks to the tenacity of Alicia and Maru, we came to the conclusion that the on-line AIC diploma could be prepared by AIC volunteers. And this was done.

In 2014 over 580 volunteers from Latin America followed the Diplomado AIC; in 2015, a pilot group took the AIC Diploma in English and adapted it for volunteers in English and French. A further session started in January 2017, with xxx participants and xxx tutors. The AIC diploma is now followed in Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA. It is a huge success; and I have to tell you that other associations are envious of us, so if you haven't yet passed the AIC Diploma, sign up for the next session!

Coordination is ensured by AIC through constant contact with national presidents, and I would like to highlight the importance of visits in the field.

All 4 of us, during our term of office, have had the opportunity to come and meet you where you are.

These are unforgettable experiences of sharing, work, friendship, and mutual openness to the world.

Personally, I have had the opportunity to visit 19 AIC associations, some of them several times, usually accompanied by a member of the EB/CA or the secretariat, to give a complementary view.

AIC Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, USA, Thailand, Taiwan, Mexico, Brazil, Guatemala, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Ukraine, UK, Slovakia, Switzerland and China.

These visits allow in-depth discussions, better understanding, mutual acknowledgement with volunteers, members of the Vincentian family and people in difficulties:

In a very poor village of Nigeria, one woman said to me: "it is wonderful for us to know that far from here, other women are concerned about us".

"You are the strength of the poor".

Isn't that a great dream for AIC in the future?

We have come to the end of this presentation of the history of AIC. We wanted to share our enthusiasm with you, our commitment to AIC, our pride in being part of this great family, and our gratitude.

Let us all be convinced ambassadors of this, and wherever we are, continue to help each other to find a just and proper place which respects the bonds among human beings, the planet and God.

The future of AIC remains to be written, and Alicia is going to outline this for us, based on the encyclical, *Laudato Si*.

Conclusions – Alicia Duhne

As heard in the various presentations, the AIC, from the time of its foundation, has carried on a marvelous work.

If we reflect on some of the words of the encyclical, *Laudato Si* and Objective #17 of the UN sustainability goals, we will be able to see how we have been able to give life to the principles that are enunciated in these document (even though both of these documents have been recently published).

Let us then reflect on these words of the encyclical and these words of the Goals for Sustainable Development:

#86 of Laudato Si: The spectacle of the countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.

#92 of Laudato Si: Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.

Objective #17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development



LAUDATO SI'

As a result of this reading and reflection we can conclude that the Pope and the United Nations have invited us to accept our differences so that as we recognize our strengths, we join together and work in collaboration with others (and do so because we recognize the fact that we are all loved by God).

In the presentations that we have just listened to, we notice that each president has attempted to give a continuity to the work that has been accomplished. Our goal has always been to continue to build upon the foundations that were established by previous generations. Thus, the role of our leaders does not come to an end when they conclude their term of office. Indeed, the various former presidents continue to accompany us and share with us their knowledge and wisdom. Yet there has always been a respect as found in the adage: *they accompany us, but not so closely as to prevent our forward movement and not so far away so that we cannot see them!*

When speaking about our work in networks, it is important to recognize the incredible support that we have received from our spiritual advisors, namely, members of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. During all these years, they have helped us to preserve our Vincentian charism and to be faithful to the teachings of the Church. They have provided us with a living example of what it means to work together as a Vincentian Family.

We must also state that the role of the Secretariat has always been an important element in our collaborative work. The fact that this group is located in a set place (Louvain-la-Neuve) and that they support all our activities enables us to provide a continuity to our work. Speaking personally, I do not know how I would be able to do all my work without them (individuals who have worked with various presidents and who have an incredible experience).

I hope that these reflections have been helpful... let us then continue with our program.

St Louise de Marillac and Charity

Sr Pilar Caycho, DC

Introduction

The four hundredth anniversary of the origin of the Vincentian charism, which we have the joy of celebrating, should lead us to a deeper understanding of Louise de Maillac and her effective and successful collaboration with the Confraternities of Charity.

In light of the fact that Louise was never recognized or accepted by her mother, we are invited to take notice of “the plan of God” which is always present among those who suffer. Louise, because of her illegitimate birth, experienced rejection and marginalization by the Marillac family. At a very early age she was sent to a boarding school where she developed her intellectual skills. She expressed a desire to enter a religious congregation but her family decided that she should marry.



God’s providence led her to an encounter with Vincent de Paul who became her spiritual director. He perceived Louise to be restless and very concerned about her son. At the same time, however, Vincent valued Louise’s deep spirituality and after the death of her husband, Vincent involved her in ministry with the Confraternities of Charity. For thirty-five years Vincent and Louise worked together in the mission that God had entrusted to them. Slowly Louise became more confident in herself and visited many of the Confraternities (a mission that Vincent had entrusted to her). Later she, together with Vincent, would establish the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

1. The personality of Louise de Marillac

Through her letters, we come to see that Louise was very affective and emotional. Vincent often counseled her to moderate her tenderness and her exaggerated manifestations of love toward her son, Michel.

Because of her affectivity, she was perceived by people as a welcoming, sociable, delicate and sacrificing woman. In other words, a charming woman whose tenderness enabled people to open their hearts to her and thus, enter into a relationship of friendship... a woman whose presence filled the air with joy.

Louise was anxious about the future, about that which was unknown and at one time, that anxiety characterized her life. She came to know the “ups” and “downs”, the successes and failures and the promises and disappointments of life.

It seems that Louise suffered from a guilt complex (1623), that is, she felt her husband’s illness was a punishment because she had not fulfilled her vow. She felt she was being punished because of the failures of her son... until the time of her death she felt responsible for the sins of the Daughters, for the fact that some of the Daughters abandoned their vocation, and for whatever went wrong with the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

Louise had an analytical mind that allowed her to examine and reflect upon her life. She was obsessed with examining her interior life. She felt she deserved hell and that led to profound expressions of humility.

Vincent de Paul, who understood the psychology of women, helped Louise to move beyond those limitations and presented her to the poor and encouraged her to find happiness in her life. Vincent needed several years in order to discover the true personality of Louise de Marillac.

Louise was a very accepting woman and her goodness and ease in understanding situations enabled her to establish good relationships with people, enabled her to draw close to people... like Vincent, she was a good organizer.

The friendship between Vincent and Louise enabled them to move beyond their difference. The source and the model of their relationship was grounded on Jesus Christ, who in the Incarnation revealed God's love for humanity. Their friendship was rooted in authenticity, in the acceptance of the other and in a respect and recognition of their complementarity.

2. Louise de Marillac: animator of the Confraternities of Charity

Vincent had established the Confraternities of Charity to care for the sick and to instruct the ignorant. Thus at the very beginning the Confraternities were the first fruit of the Vincentian charism. Wherever Vincent preached a popular mission, he established a Confraternity and in some of those group the enthusiasm and the fervor of the women declined with the passing of time. He needed someone to coordinate, to encourage and to guide the members of those groups.

In 1629, Vincent felt that Louise de Marillac was the right person to help him organize the Confraternities of Charity. He had come to know the depth of her spirituality, her human qualities and her ability with regard to organizing. He extended to her the invitation to work on behalf of the poor: *[Would you be willing to travel to Montmirail in order to visit the Confraternities that have been established in that city and in the neighboring villages]. Father de Gondi sent me word to come by coach to see him in Montmirail. Do you feel like coming, Mademoiselle? If so, you would have to leave next Wednesday on the coach to Châlons, in Champagne... And we shall have the happiness of seeing you in Montmirail.*¹

Louise after reflecting briefly on that matter, responded positively to the invitation of her spiritual director... a response that would lead her to unimagined places. Vincent sent her on her mission with the following words: *Go, therefore, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord. I pray that his divine goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the*

¹ CCD:l:63-64; CCD refers to the English translation of Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conference, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-13b), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11-12); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2009. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:l:63-64.

sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toil, and, finally, that he may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works (CCD:1:64-65)

From that time forward we notice a change in their language when writing to one another. Vincent no longer used the phrase *my daughter (ma fille)*, but rather *mademoiselle*. Vincent is no longer addressing an individual whom he is directing but is speaking to his collaborator. Louise became the Visitor of the Confraternities of Charity. Letters were exchanged on a weekly basis: they informed one another about their daily life, about the joys and the difficulties that they encountered in their mission, about possible solutions for those problems. There was a certain naturalness in the exchange of correspondence.

3. Working with the members of the Confraternities

Louise visited those places where the Confraternity of Charity had been established. Her purpose was to guarantee quality service in ministry. During those visits she reviewed their financial records, wrote reports and encouraged the women to see Christ in the poor whom they served.

In the various towns and villages that Louise visited she became aware of the ignorance of the people and felt called to establish the little-schools. In the Rule for the Confraternities she wrote: *the above mentioned widows ... shall contribute to the support of this good work... they shall teach the little girls of the villages while they are there. They shall strive to train local girls to replace them at this task during their absence. They shall do all of this for the love of God and without any remuneration*². It was in this way that the “little-school” came into existence.

In 1630, the Confraternity was established in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet and Louise was requested to serve as President of that group --- this occurred thirteen years after the establishment of the first Confraternity of Charity.

Despite their differences, Vincent and Louise have provided us with a wonderful example of what two people can do together when they are motivated by a deep love for God and for the neighbor.

3.1. Preparing for the visit

Any visit requires preparation, material as well as spiritual preparation. The mission that had been entrusted to Louise was lived as an act of faith. She was aware of being sent forth in order to accomplish something good and worthwhile. On February 5th, 1630, during the celebration of the Eucharist, Louise experienced a profound desire to give greater meaning to her mission: *at the moment of Holy Communion, it seemed to me that Our Lord inspired me to receive him as the Spouse of my soul (SWLM:705 [A.50])*.

In 1636 Louise entered into dialogue with Madame Beaufort about the establishment of a Confraternity of Charity in the parish of Saint-Étienne. The women there were very highly motivated and Louise counseled them to talk with the pastor: *In order to begin well and to persevere, they need to gather together a large number of persons, both from the nobility and from the lower class, so that*

² SWLM:729 [A.47]; SWLM refers to the English translation of LOUISE DE MARILLAC, *Spiritual Writing of Louise de Marillac*, Edited and Translated from the French by Sister Louise Sullivan, DC, New City Press, Brooklyn, New York, 1991. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [SWLM] followed by the page number, following by number of the letter or the number of the writing and or manuscript, for example, SWLM:729 [A.47].

some of them will contribute most of the funds while the others will give themselves more willingly to visit the sick poor on their appointed days (SWLM:13 [L.6]).

Louise knew how to encourage the women and did not want their enthusiasm to wane. She had very clear ideas about the organization of the Confraternities and was attentive to the smallest of details. On September 4, 1634 Louise wrote to Vincent and stated: *I am returning the Rule of Saint-Sauveur to you. I had not seen it. It appears that the first part makes the Confraternity completely dependent upon the pastor. I do not know if this is wise. It is certainly true the pastors in Beauvais would be delighted to have it that way. However, this would immediately lead them to want no one else to know what was happening with each Confraternity (SWLM:9 [L.4]).*

3.2. Louise's travels

Louise utilized the ordinary means of transportation for her travels. Short distances (10 to 15 kilometers) she walked or traveled by horse. For longer distances she traveled by coach which were by and large quite uncomfortable. In the places where she stopped to rest or to eat, she discovered promiscuity and outrageous food prices. Her experience would enable her to give good advice to the Daughters when they would travel together: *When you arrive, you shall ask the innkeeper's wife to provide you with a small room so that you can sleep separately from the others ... since bread is usually more expensive at an inn, you would be well advised to buy a good quantity from a baker so as to meet your needs (SWLM:731 [A.77]).*

During her travel, when she saw the steeple of a church, she was accustomed to ask her guardian angel to greet her Master in the tabernacle: *Oh my dear angel, look at this place in which Jesus dwells. Tell the Divine Savior that I adore him and that I love him with all my heart. Ask this wonderful prisoner of love to enter into my heart. This heart is too small for such a great King but through love and faith I want to enlarge my heart.³*

3.3. Louise visits the Confraternities

When Louise arrived at her destiny, she sought lodging in Neufville or in Pont-Saint-Maxence. She wanted to guard her freedom and so looked for lodging at some hostel or private house.

Her visits involved: being informed about the life and the establishment of the Confraternity in a particular place, examining the quality of service that the women provided, and viewing the manner in which the members interacted among themselves. Louise's competency in many different areas of life, as well as her keen sense of observation, allowed her to offer concrete solutions to specific problems.

As Louise ministered with the members of the Confraternities, she provided a motherly, feminine touch... indeed, Louise was whole-hearted in that ministry. She traveled from village to village and encouraged the members in their service; she herself visited the sick poor and wanted the members to provide the infirm with the best care possible. That desire was expressed in a letter that Louise wrote to Vincent de Paul (June 5, 1627): *I have been aware that Mademoiselle du Fay has been more*

³ Translator's Note: no reference is give for this quotation and I was unable to find it among Louise's writings.

anxious than usual. We spent the feast of Pentecost together. After services, she would have liked to confide in me but we remained open to and desirous of accomplishing the will of God (SWLM:6 [L.1]).

In Pont-Saint-Maxence, Louise was overjoyed with the service that the women provided, not only to the sick poor, but all the people of that area: *they show great cordiality to one another and are devoted to works of charity. Even their husbands encourage them in their endeavors. The people have noticed them, and since the establishment of the Charity, the local inhabitants are better (SWLM:723 [A.52])*

Louise valued the experience of the women and trusted them: *as for keeping the accounts, I think that the women can take care of this themselves (SWLM:9 [L.4]).* Louise was very attentive when listening to the members and wrote very detailed reports to Vincent about her visits.

3.4. Some difficulties among the members of the Confraternities

The members of the Confraternity were enthusiastic and people of good-will, but very quickly difficulties arose, especially with regard to different ways of serving the poor. At the same time there was often a question with regard to who should receive preferential treatment and who should be served.

Such difficulties were not uncommon and had to be confronted by those persons who had positions of leadership in the different Confraternities: *There seems to be cordiality among the Ladies, although some of them sometimes criticize the behavior of the Officers (SWLM:721 [A.53]).* When Louise arrived at Neufville-le-Roy she found *much dissension among the Ladies over the reception of the sick and the purchase of meat. Each one wants to bring the meat from home according to her whim, if she does not receive the customary amount (SWLM:722 [A.53]).*

In Sannois, the treasurer (a well-intentioned woman) wanted to do everything herself and as a result the other members of the Confraternity lost interest: *The Ladies of Charity have let their zeal cool a bit. Often, they do not visit the sick on the days for which they are responsible because the Treasurer is so good-hearted that she cooks the food for those who should be doing it that day (SWLM:705 [A.51]).*

Louise de Marillac encouraged those women to work together. She instructed them and read to them a draft of the proposed Rule ... a passage that dealt with the relationships among the members: *said widows shall contribute to the support of this good work, in keeping with their means and their devotion. They shall cherish one another as sisters whom Our Lord has united by the bond of his love (SWLM:728 [A.54]).*

Louise understood that the mission among the suffering members of Christ was not a personal matter but rather that mission had to be embraced by all who claimed to be members of the Church. Since no one individual “owned” the mission, Louise felt that it was necessary to seek advice in order to verify what was being said and done.

3.5. Service on behalf of the poor

Louise was very attentive to the manner in which the women engaged in their service on behalf of the sick poor. In her reports, she was very attentive to details:

- In Bulles she observed that the sick were visited three times a day. The women bring to the sick cooked portions of meat but not in equal amounts because each Lady wants to take from her home what she judges right so as to please the sick.
- In Verneuil it seemed that the sick were visited at a very late stage in their illness.
- At another place, the Ladies visit the sick when they are no longer contagious; they did not bring them food until noontime and then, very little.

Louise noticed all these details because in her zeal she was convinced that in serving the poor, the women were serving Christ. She avoided making judgments about those practices that she felt did not contribute to the well-being of the sick, but rather invited the members to reread their Rule and to live in accord with the directives outlined in said Rule.

Frequently the members asked Louise: *Whom should we care for? What persons are truly poor? What are we to do when we are asked to care for sick persons who possess material goods?* Louise was very attentive to such concerns and to the many other concerns of the members of the Confraternities.

Louise was also attentive to the concerns of the inhabitants of the villages where the women performed their service on behalf of the sick poor. In Neufville, the people murmured about the delay in caring for the sick and in Gournay, the people supervised the use of alms ... *the local inhabitants complain that charitable donations are used to have Masses said* (SWLM:723 [A.52]).

When such concerns were brought to Louise's attention, she invited the Ladies to come together and to reflect on those matters. Louise demonstrated that she was very competent in legal and financial matters, and was very precise in her use of words.

3.6. The spiritual life of the group

Louise did not conclude her visit with the members of the Confraternity until she had examined the spiritual life of the group. When visiting the group in Herblay she saw that the members were still in their "first fervor", while the members of the group in Sannois, *or at least the majority of them, go months without receiving Holy Communion. They need to have their zeal rekindled by a sermon* (SWLM:705 [A.51]). In all her visits Louise was greatly satisfied to note the concern of the Ladies to accompany the sick poor at the time of their death (and where possible, they sought the presence of a priest).

Louise made note of the enthusiasm that her visits created among the members of the Confraternities. Later, when speaking to the Daughters she stated: *Once I visited a village where all the women were greatly consoled at my presence. They spoke to their husbands about this and these men wanted to come to listen to me. They were told that men were not part of the group, but nevertheless their husbands hid themselves in various places around the meeting place. After, they asked if I would hear their confession⁴.*

Many of the Confraternities wanted to be visited by Louise. In most cases, Vincent communicated those calls from the members of the Confraternities: *Mademoiselle Tranchot really wants you in*

⁴ Translator's Note: No reference was given to this quote and I was unable to find the reference even though I am familiar with the quote.

Villeneuve-Saint-Georges where the Charity is going badly. I think Our Lord is reserving the success of that good work for you (CCD:I:128).

4. Qualities of Louise de Marillac as the animator of the Confraternities of Charity

The members of the Confraternities of Charity discovered in Louise de Marillac certain qualities that helped them to understand the importance of their own vocation:

- Louise listened attentively to the members which allowed them to express their difficulties and their doubts. Such listening meant that Louise was able to put aside her own concerns and difficulties (she understood that she had to put aside her concerns with regard to her son in order to be totally present to the Ladies of the Confraternity).
- In every matter, the members of the Confraternities experienced themselves as being accepted and understood by Louise. This meant that the women were able to acquire a greater degree of confidence in themselves since they felt that someone understood what they were doing.
- Louise received the members with such simplicity that the women felt consoled and above all were in turn assisted in finding solutions to their problems and/or difficulties.
- The women valued the respect that was shown to them. Louise never judged in a harsh manner their attitudes or their behavior. Louise knew how to observe those matters that were not being done properly and because she was able to do this in such a delicate manner her words were well-received by the members of the Confraternity.
- Louise was able to discover and value the potential of every member of the Confraternity that she visited.

Throughout the years, Louise's competency was honed by listening to legal and financial experts. She observed the manner in which doctors acted. Above all else, Louise was an avid reader. All of this influenced her decisions and her counsel. She was convinced about the importance of knowledge and about the need to be up-to-date if one was to instruct others.

In his biography, Jean Calvet states: *Louise de Marillac had a gift for imparting instruction, a passionate love of teaching, for she valued knowledge and prized wisdom for which men and women were made.*⁵

The Confraternities alleviated hunger and the "little schools" provided the poor with knowledge and spiritual formation: *To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny ... This presupposes and requires the right to education --- also for girls (excluded in certain places) --- which is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in the education of their children* (Pope Francis, Address at the United Nations, September 25, 2015).

5. Establishment of the Daughters of Charity

Through her ministry with the Confraternities of Charity, Louise acquired a profound understanding about the needs of the poor. At the same time she developed here innate leadership qualities and sought the most effective structures for serving others. Thus, on November 29th, 1633, Louise began to prepare some young girls in her own house ... young women who would tend to the needs of the

⁵ Jean Calvet, *Louise de Marillac: A Portrait*, translated by G. F. Pullen, P.J. Kennedy and Sons, New York, 19590, p. 118.

poor and through their community life would support one another in their service. From those humble origins arose the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Louise provided leadership and direction to the development of services that she and Vincent initiated.

6. Conclusion

For thirty-five years Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac labored together in the mission that God had entrusted to them. Louise, a woman with a profound spirituality, made Jesus present in her midst and did that through her life, her service and her teachings. Indeed, Louise discovered Jesus, contemplated him, proclaimed him and served him in the person of those men and women who were poor. A provident God had destined her from all eternity to engage in a charitable mission which she would accomplish in the company of Vincent de Paul.

Vincent de Paul accompanied Louise and directed her spiritual development. He came to value Louise as an intuitive woman, concerned about details, gifted with the qualities of a leader... a woman whom he was looking for as his collaborator.

On one occasion, Louise stated that to follow Christ, to serve him in his suffering members is to love with a *very rare form of love*⁶, that is, with a strong, firm love that is not intimidated by any difficulty that might arise. Louise's strength was the Mother of God: *all authentic Christians ought to have a great love for the Blessed Mother*⁷.

Louise de Marillac, the animator of the Confraternities, was able to assist the women involved in this charitable ministry come to an understanding of their vocation in the church and in the world... and also helped those women fulfill their mission. Together they lived the adventure of a committed faith in service on behalf of the poor. Rooted in the word of God, Louise found the strength that allowed her to commit herself to the work of animating the Confraternities. Therefore, that love for every member of the AIC allowed the poor (those persons who were despised and humiliated) to be renewed, to rise up and become new men and women, freed from every form of evil and sin, freed and restored to dignity.

Let us listen to the words that Pope John Paul II wrote in 1988, words that from the depths of my heart I want to share with you: we are *called to become the living sign of Jesus Christ and his Church in showing love towards the sick and the suffering (Christifideles Laici, #53)* ... in this way we give witness to the gospel of life.

I conclude with the following words of Pope Francis: *The task which the Lord gives us, on the contrary, is the vocation to charity in which each of Christ's disciples puts his or her entire life at his service, so to grow each day in love... You are that crowd who follows the Master and who makes visible his concrete love for each person* (Pope Francis, Homily on the occasion of the Canonization of Mother Teresa, September 4, 2016)

⁶ Translator's Note: The reference to p. 817 in the Spanish edition of Louise's writings is incorrect and I could not find the right reference

⁷ Castañares, (no book is referenced), volume ii, p. 286.

Reflection Workshop on St. Louise

Sr Françoise Petit, DC, AIC International Spiritual Advisor

1st point: Saint Louise was very attentive to the educational and spiritual formation of youth.
What does Saint Louise's life have to say to 21st century youth?

2nd point: Saint Louise experienced times of trouble and anxiety.
What helped Saint Louise to overcome her fears?

3rd point: Saint Louise encouraged the first Confraternities of Charity in a very concrete way through letters and visits.
What activities (services) would Saint Louise encourage us to adopt today?

4th point: Saint Louise was able to make clear to the first Confraternities of Charity the demands of working as a team.
What needs to be improved in the life of my team?

5th point: Saint Louise was a formator and teacher. We are especially aware of the pedagogical method of her visits.
What can we learn from Saint Louise about animating local groups?

6th point: Saint Louise was very attentive to the education of children, especially young girls.
How could we better support the mothers who come to us in the education and raising of their children?

7th point: Saint Louise invited the first Confraternities of Charity to relieve those who were most poor.
Who are the strangers for us today? How can we welcome them?

At the end of your discussion, please select a commitment that, when you return, you will be able to pass on to your group in order to implement it.



Caring for Creation as a New Work of Mercy

F. Mauricio Fernández, CM, AIC International Spiritual Advisor



For many days I thought about how I would entitle this reflection that I have been requested to present during the 2017 General Assembly of the AIC. I wondered if it would be appropriate to entitle it: *caring for creation as a new work of mercy...* thus highlighting one of the messages of the Latin America Bishops as well as a message of the Pope.

Here I recall the film of Maurice Cloche, *Monsieur Vincent*, the scene where Vincent de Paul took

charge of the parish of Clichy (1617).⁸ He found great poverty there... the house of God and the people themselves has been neglected and thus Vincent saw ruin and abandonment. Reflecting on that brief scene we can imagine what has happened to our common home which is the creation of God. Because of our neglect, creation is falling little by little into disrepair. Yet, God saw that everything was good. We, human beings, are destroying the planet Earth. By nature we are intelligent beings... let us act in accord with our nature. Indeed, let us not act in a manner that is contradictory to our nature, in a manner that will not only destroy this planet but will also destroy ourselves. The solution is in our hands. Through our activity we can preserve our life, our planet and our common home... all of which are the creation of God. Such is the conclusion of the Book of Genesis and I also believe that is the conclusion of the many groups of volunteers of the AIC... men and women who work together in so many different countries throughout the world. I would imagine that when we help people rise above their situation of poverty and misery and when we see positive results flowing from our activity, then we also can conclude that everything is good. Yes, then we can also see that our common home is being built up (that common home that has been gifted to us to administer and for which, according to the gospel, we will have to render an account of our administration.

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, the Pope reflects on what he wants people to remember, namely, those situations that *have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course* (#53).⁹ The Pope confronts all those who have been baptized and, therefore, confronts all the volunteers of the AIC: *Christians who do not protect creation, who do not allow creation to grow, are Christians who give no importance to God's work, a work that originates*

⁸ Translator's Note: I am not sure what scene is being referenced, but Vincent became pastor of the parish in Clichy in 1612... in 1617 Vincent was ministering in the parish of Châtillon and it was there in 1617 that the first Confraternity of Charity was established, thus the origin of the Vincentian charism.

⁹ The numbered references throughout this reflection refer to specific paragraphs of the encyclical, *Laudato Si*.

from God's love (#64, 217). Thus, the first challenge: in our daily activity what can we do to take care of our common home... or, in the Pope's words, what can we do to take care of creation?

An anecdote: some years ago a family, that was visiting the United States, decided to go on an outing (it was a very hot day). The stopped to buy something to drink. The father of the family wanted a Coke ... and so he bought a can of soda and drank it in his car. When he finished the drink, he opened the car window and tossed the can on the highway. A policeman was traveling behind him and the officer got out of his car and picked up the can. A few miles further down the road, the officer pulled over the car and asked the man for his can of Coke. Since he could not produce the can, the officer told him to return and pick up the can. If, however, he could not find it, he would be given a steep fine. After searching for a long period of time, the man returned to the officer who was waiting for him. At that moment the officer handed the man the can that he had thrown on the highway and also gave him a ticket and then said: *perhaps in your country you can throw cans on the highway, but here you cannot do that!* I am sure that that individual would never again thrown something on the highway. When he had to pay a penalty, he became more careful.

What then can we do in order to transform and change our common home?

When we finish reading this encyclical, we find ourselves confronted by a question that experts feel should have been placed at the beginning of this document: *what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are growing up?* (#160). The question is not concerned solely about the environment in isolation, indeed, that issue cannot be approached piecemeal. Thus, we are led to ask other questions about the meaning of life and the value of life in society: What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? The Pope states: *unless we struggle with these deeper questions, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results* (#160).

Let us think about that question: *what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are growing up?...* or using the words of Saint Vincent: *what would Jesus do in this situation?* In other words, what would Jesus do to preserve this home that belongs to all people and what would he do in order to be able to respond with the words of the sacred scripture: *God looked at everything that he made, and he found it very good* (Genesis 1:31)? What can the volunteers of the AIC do in order to preserve this great common home that the Father has given to them to administer / Let us again listen to the words of the author of the Book of Genesis: *God looked at everything he made, and he found it very good* (Genesis 1:31).

We can affirm with great certainty that the inspiration for this encyclical can be found in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis is convinced of those words that are found in *Gaudium et Spes: nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in the heart of the Church* (Gaudium et Spes, #1). In light of that conviction the Pope speaks freely and courageously about climate change, immigration, social inequality and the responsibility of political leaders with regard to the problems that confront the world. Those problems cannot and are not ignored by the members of the AIC and in fact a response is given whenever the volunteers engage in projects that promote the dignity of women, of children, and of the elderly in various countries on the five continents. The process that led the Pope to publish this encyclical was begun many years before the actual publication of that

document. We should remember that on March 13th, 2013, when Jorge Bergoglio was elected Pope, he chose the name, Francis (in honor of this model saint who ministered among the poor and was concerned about the environment). Unfortunately, he did not chose the name Vincent who also opted for the poor and the marginalized. A close friend of the Pope, Bishop Jorge Lozano has stated that during May 2013 Pope Francis express in a public manner his plan to develop an encyclical that would address some of the urgent environmental issues. Two year later, when the encyclical was published, it became clear that this document was not written while sitting alone at his desk... rather the Pope had entered into dialogue with moral theologians, with leaders of other religions, and with scientists and experts in various fields of study.

Nevertheless, the concern of the Pope was also the concern of Vincent de Paul. When the Pope speaks about the land being abused and neglected, it was as if he were listening to Vincent talking four centuries before when he stated: *the poor are my worry and my sorrow*. The Pope is concerned about the manner in which we care for the earth and encourages people to change in order that our surroundings might also change. Therefore, we might ask if we ourselves are willing to change so that we might change our surroundings.

There are seven parts to the encyclical, an introduction and six chapters. It is not a very long document even though it has 246 numbers. The encyclical concludes with two prayers (a prayer for the earth and a prayer in union with creation). The title of the document is taken from the first words of the encyclical, *Laudato si, mi signore...* words taken from the Canticle of Creatures that was written by Saint Francis Assisi in the thirteenth century.

Four months after the publication of the encyclical, Pope Francis addressed the United Nations. There he went to the very heart of the matter and referred to the words of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, as well the ideas he expressed in *Laudato Si*. He stated: *The ecological crisis, and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity, can threaten the very existence of the human species. The baneful consequences of an irresponsible mismanagement of the global economy, guided only by ambition for wealth and power, must serve as a summons to a forthright reflection on man: "man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature". Creation is compromised "where we ourselves have the final word... The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any instance above ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves". Consequently, the defense of the environment and the fight against exclusion demand that we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, one which includes the natural difference between man and woman, and absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions* (Address at the United Nations, September 25, 2015).

The publication of the encyclical occurred before the UN Conference on Climate Change that was held in Paris (December 2015).

Speaking to the press, Ban Ki-moon highlighted the fact that humanity has the obligation to protect the planet, Earth and to enter into solidarity with the most poor and vulnerable members of society, those individuals who suffer most as a result of the consequences of climate change.

Therefore, three months before the statement of Ban Ki-moon, Pope Francis stated: *The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic. This common home of all men and women must also be built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature* (Address at the United Nations, September 25, 2015).

In his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis made it clear that the root causes of poverty must be confronted and no one should be marginalized. It was that same line of thinking that led the United Nation in 2015 to adopt the Objectives for Sustainable Development and to raise questions about economic and general inequality and the unsustainability of our present mode of life.

Ban Ki-moon stated: *Pope Francis and I are in agreement that climate change is a moral question that demands urgent and global action. It is a question of social justice, human rights and fundamental ethics.* That is the understanding of the 150,00 volunteers who are involved in more than 10,00 projects as they continue to examine concrete steps that will enable them to manifest their solidarity with Pope Francis. The members of the AIC want to contribute to the building up of creation and not to its destruction. Indeed, if God created the world in six days and saw that everything was good, the members of the AIC do not want to move in an opposite direction and engage in any activity that would not be good`. Some concrete examples: *avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, turning off unnecessary lights* (#211) ... recycle. In other words, we can do small things that contribute to the betterment of our planet and the betterment of the life of humanity: *an integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness* (#230).

All of this will be easier if our starting point is rooted in contemplation that is derived from faith: *as believers we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings. By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm* (#220). The encyclical communicates a clear and hopeful message to everyone: *humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home* (#13); *men and women are still capable of intervening positively* (#58); *yet all is not lost ... human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start* (#205). Pope Francis addresses all Catholics and repeats the words of John Paul II: *Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation and that their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith* (#63) and the Pope furthermore expresses his desire to *enter into dialogue with people about our common home* (#3).

The general outline of this encyclical, which has become part of the Church's Magisterium, is described in paragraph #15. The encyclical, which is addressed to *every person living on this planet* (#3), is divided into six chapters.

The objectives of the encyclical are the following:

1. *To enter into dialogue with all people about our common home* (#3).

2. Such dialogue will help us understand the greatness, the urgency and the beauty of the challenges that confront us.
3. *The work of the Church not only seeks to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time she must, above all, protect humankind from self-destruction (#79).*
4. There is an invitation *for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet (#14).*
5. *A broad, responsible scientific and social debate needs to take place, one capable of considering all the available information and of calling things by their name (#135).*

Chapter One: what is happening to our common home or that which we might refer to as the reality of our situation? What is described in this chapter is the result of listening to the best scientists of the present era. Here we find a description of what is happen and the starting point is the following: *our common home is falling into serious disrepair (#61).*

1. Pollution, waste and the throwaway culture;
2. The issue of water;
3. The loss of biodiversity;
4. Decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society;
5. Global inequality;
6. Weak responses;
7. A variety of opinions.

Chapter Two: The gospel of creation or that which we might call spirituality. An analysis of biblical texts and the Judeo-Christian tradition.

- Creation – Genesis 1-3
--- creation is good,
--- the dignity of all creation,
--- the human person is called to care for the earth.
- Relationships and inter-relationship with God, with our neighbor and with the earth (#66).
- Sin has broken those three relationships (#66).
- To till and keep the earth --- to cultivate, to guard, to be mindful of, to protect, to care for, to preserve and to value.
- To respect the laws of nature.

Chapter Three: The human roots of the ecological crisis or that which we might call our concerns. Here there is a focus on the dominant technocratic paradigm and the place of human beings and of human activity in the world.

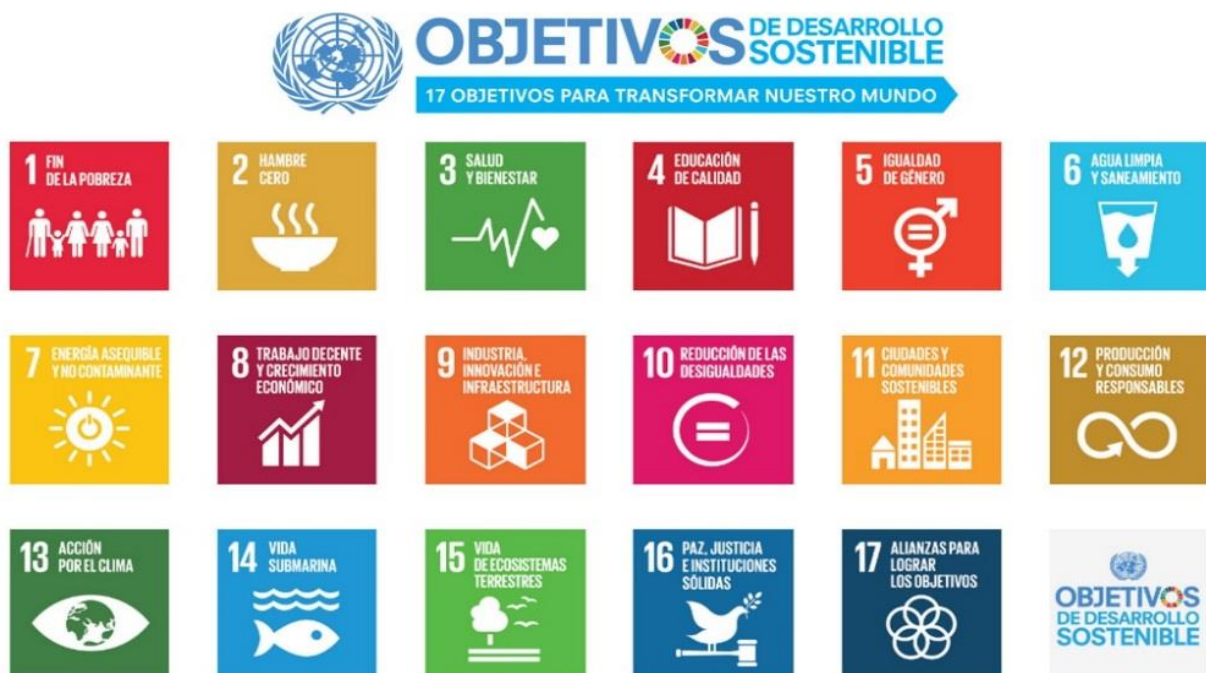
- The need to recognize the deeper cause (#101).
- The values and limits of technoscience (#103-105).
- The technocratic paradigm... the result being that *human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational (#106).*
- The culture of relativism (#123).

Chapter Four: Integral ecology or that which we would refer to as the practical aspects of the encyclical. The encyclical proposes *an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimension (#137)* and one that is inseparably connected to the environmental situation.

Chapter Five: Lines of approach and action or that which we might refer to as the things that must be done. Pope Francis proposes engaging in an honest dialogue at every level... a dialogue that will facilitate processes of transparent decision making.

Chapter Six: Ecological education and spirituality... and I leave the title of this section to the imagination of each individual... you can give it your own title. I do believe, however, that this chapter is closely related to the previous one, especially with regard to the presentation of various proposals. Here we recall that no plan will be effective unless it is grounded on a formed and responsible conscience... thus we propose certain principles in order to deepen our education, spiritual, ecclesial, political and theological formation:

- Seek the best means of dialogue which can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us (#163).
- Look for ways to eliminate extreme poverty (#172).
- Dialogue about the environment in international political forums (#164).
- Value and learn from positive steps and experiences (#168).
- A great concern about the far less significant progress with regard to the protection of biodiversity and issues related to desertification (\$169).



The text concludes with two prayers: one that is intended for those who believe in an all-powerful Creator-God and the other for those who believe in Jesus Christ (the words, *praise be to you*, appear at the beginning and the conclusion of the encyclical).

Let me conclude this section with the following words of Vincent de Paul: *let us love God, my brothers and sister, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.*¹⁰

We cannot deny the coincidence between the adoption of the document, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (a document that was signed on September 2015 by the heads of state and the representatives at the United Nations) and the publication of *Laudato Si* on June 18th, 2015.

This encyclical of Pope Francis has been a beacon of light that has illuminated decisions of great importance: the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals together with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are a universal call to adopt those means that will eradicate poverty, protect the planet and guarantee that all people can enjoy peace and prosperity. We can feel proud that the members of the AIC have had such an experience in each of the places where the Association is present.

The 17 SDGs are based on the Millennial Development Objectives but they include some new areas, for example, climate change, economic inequality, sustainable consumption. Peace and justice, innovation. The objectives are interrelated and frequently the key to success in one area involves questions related to another area. The heart of these objectives is a human ecology. This paradigm has been clearly presented by the Church in *Laudato Si*. The cries of humanity and of the earth are inseparable because they have one and the same structural origin and only in that way can they be resolved in an effective manner. Once again let us listen to the words of Vincent who stated: *the poor are my worry and my sorrow.*

The SDGs envision a spirit of collaboration and a pragmatic approach, both of which are proper to our charism and therefore, proper to the AIC. This, then, involves us in opting to find the most effective way to better life in a sustainable manner to that future generations can also rejoice in this gift of life. The UN document provides clear guidelines and goals that each country, in accord with their own situation, can adopt.

The SDGs are an inclusive agenda that attack the fundamental causes of poverty and that unite us in our common struggle to achieve positive change that will benefit all men and women and also benefit our planet.

The seventeen objectives for sustainable development are inseparably related to the Vincentian

¹⁰ CCD:XI:32; CCD refers to Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conference, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-13b), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11-12); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2009. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XI:32.

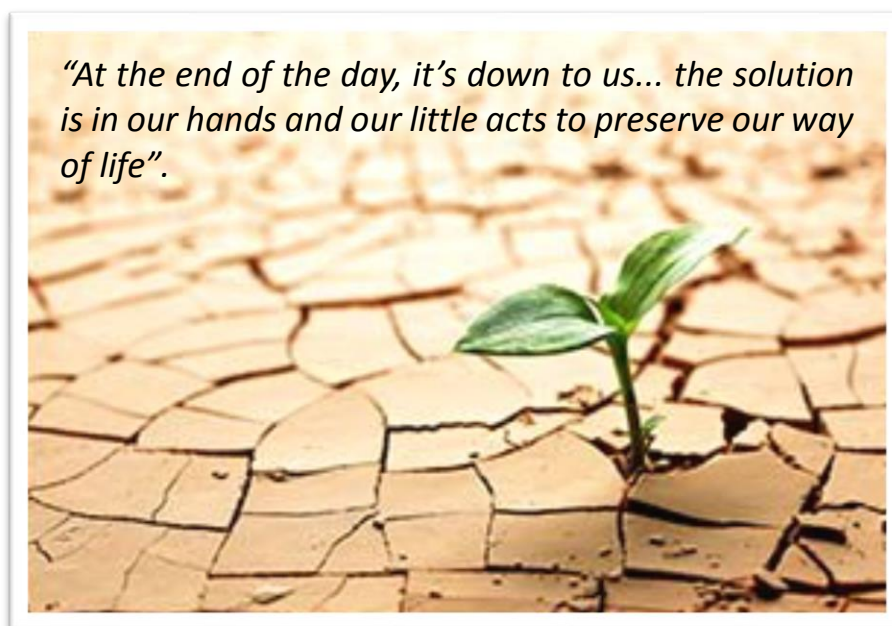
charism and to the aspirations of the Catholic Church as outlined in the teachings of Pope Francis. As we read those seventeen objectives we become aware of the fact that they refer to matters that all of us are concerned about and therefore, matters that we are attempting to change. What can we do to implement those objectives in the areas where we live and work? What are the significance of those objectives for the volunteers of the AIC? What can we do to in order to adapt our work to a systemic change approach that is also in line with the sustainable objectives? What type of formation do we need in order to connect our local agendas with the global agenda of humankind? Let us simply take some time to consider the 12th objective: to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns...

Let us attempt to respond to all these questions during the workshops that will follow this presentation.

Finally, let us allow the following three references to the encyclical to touch our hearts:

- *There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions. Let us examine our conscience and reflect on the activities that we engage in so that we might preserve our common home. It is wonderful how education can bring about real change in lifestyle... all of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings (#211)*
- *The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion (#217),*
- *The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion (#219),*

No se puede negar las coincidencias entre el documento ***“Transformar nuestro mundo: la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible”***, firmado por Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno y Altos Representantes en la Asamblea General de la ONU, en Septiembre de 2015 y *“Laudato si”*, difundida el 18 de junio de 2015.



Workshop on the Care of our Common Home and AIC's Grassroots Activities in this regard

AIC International Secretariat

Everything begins on an individual level, with a personal change of attitude. Each one of us can be part of the solution. There are various attitudes, that if we they are embraced, will allow us to make a difference... and we have the ability to make that decision with regard to accepting or rejecting those attitudes.

Once we have made that change on an individual level, we are able to act on the local, national or international level and finally, able to integrate those changes into our activity as AIC members.

During the exchange of ideas that took place during the workshops, thousands of suggestions were made... these were written down (on paper in the shape of a leaf) and then pasted on the image of a tree that was placed on the wall of the meeting hall.



Suggestions:

On an individual level:

- Turn off the lights in empty rooms;
- Do not leave electronic devices connected;
- Use lightbulbs (LED) that consume less electricity;
- Lower the heating temperature in rooms and house;
- Be aware of water consumption when showering, brushing teeth, washing hands, etc.;
- Wash dishes in a basin;
- Water plants with the water that was used to wash vegetables;
- Use the shorter wash cycle when washing clothes.

Recycle:

- Separate organic waste and use it to make plant fertilizer;
- Recycle plastic, for example, plastic water bottles;
- Utilize reusable plates, cups and utensils.

Fight against waste:

- Buy only that which is necessary;
- Eat in a responsible manner;
- Buy in a manner that expresses solidarity;
- Bring your own bags when buying at the supermarket.

Preserve nature:

- Avoid toxic cleansers; use vinegar;
- Use less soap in washing machines;
- Reuse printed paper when printing draft copies of documents;
- Print less.

Intergenerational communication

- Speak with family members about these matters and express your concern;
- Listen to younger family members, who are often better informed about environmental matters in their schools.

On the level of neighborhood or city as well as regional level:

Food:

- Do not throw away surplus food;
- Create community gardens that allow people to:
 - reestablish a relationship with the earth;
 - grow fruits and vegetables that can be eaten and shared with others;
 - socialize;
- At fairs and markets engage in exchanges of products from other regions;
- Promote the use of natural fertilizers;
- Give preference to the cultivation of edible plants.

Transition in the use of energies:

- Develop projects that allow other sources of energy to replace the use of crude oil;
- Reduce energy consumption by using low consumption lighting, for example, in greenhouses.

Preservation of nature:

- Clean contaminated sites and gather up abandoned garbage;
- Decontaminate the soil and the land;
- Make a commitment to reforestation programs;
- Sensitize people to the reality of climate changes --- droughts, cyclones, forest fires;
- In places where there is no indoor plumbing; encourage people to use latrines;

Recycling of waste material:

- Organize with children the collection of plastic which can then be sold, and the money utilized to finance projects in the area of health or the cultivation of food.
- Recycle electronic devices.

Construction:

- Insulate buildings well;
- Install solar panels;
- Install insulation panels behind radiators.

Education:

- Sensitize people to environmental problems;
- Encourage companies to change their methods of production;
- Engage in the struggle against poverty.

Organisation of the Workshop

	Content	Objectives	Method
11.30-11.40 10 min	Introduction to Sustainable Development (SD) actions		Introduction – Link with the speech of Fr. Mauricio, SDGs, Encyclical and AIC monthly training reflections – presentation of 3 AIC grassroots actions by the volunteers.
11.40-11.50 10 min	Actions of SD at individual level	Generate a change of attitude at individual level	Explain how change is driven by the individual initiative & give some easy and simple examples – explain the following activities.
11.50-12.15 20 min	Exchange and commitment on what each one can do at individual level	idem	In small groups of 4, exchange on what each person can implement at individual level & write 1 concrete commitment on a post-it.
12.15-12.30 15 min	idem	idem	Feedback in plenary session – sharing and feelings on what has been experienced in the preceding dynamics.
Lunch break			Post the post-it on the tree.
14.30-14.45 15 min	Actions of SD at local, national and international level + presentation of 3 AIC actions	Generate a change at local, national & international + make AIC best practices about SD known	Reminder of what has been done in the morning + presentation of 3 AIC actions by the volunteers + explanation of the following activities.
14.45-15.05 20 min	idem	idem	In small groups of 4, exchange on what exists at local, national and/or international level to support these initiatives or suggest others.
15.05-15.20 15 min	Presentation of 3 AIC actions	Make AIC best practices about SD known	Presentation of 3 AIC actions by the volunteers.
15.20-15.30 10 min	Initiatives of SD in AIC actions	Generate AIC actions linked with SD	Explanation of the following activities: include SD in grassroots actions + write a commitment on a post-it.
15.30-15.50 20 min	idem	idem	In small groups of 4, exchange on what each local team can do to include SD in its activities.
15.50-16.10 20 min			Feedback in plenary – sharing, questions and feelings about what has been experienced during both preceding activities.
16.10-16.20 10 min			Summary of the workshops.
16.20-16.30 10 min			Post the post-it on the tree.

AIC's work with regard to sustainable development:

During the 2017 General Assembly, we presented nine projects that included elements of sustainable development, for example, education with regard to the protection of the environment and the sorting of waste products; the utilization of local products with regard to food distribution; construction of model homes with recycled bricks (bricks made from recycled plastic bottles and recycled garbage), sustainable agriculture and community gardens; planting trees to limit soil erosion, utilization of solar panels.

These projects have been publicized on our website: www.aic-international.org

1. AIC Belgium – Waremme: distribution of food to families in precarious situations

The 30 volunteers from the AIC group in Waremme want to promote a balanced diet and so every week, they propose a selection of seasonal fruits and vegetables to disadvantaged people in the local area (single people, single-parent families and large families). This sustainable development project gets the beneficiaries involved and values their skills through concrete actions and a welcoming, friendly and respectful environment.



2. AIC Brazil – Campina Grande: environmental education for 30 children and adolescents living in a marginalized community



Enabling 30 children and adolescents from a marginalized community to dream of “another world”: this is the mission of the “Imagine” project run by AIC volunteers from Campina Grande. The activities are many and varied, including educational support, teaching about peace and citizenship, raising awareness about preserving the planet to guarantee a better future and art workshops to encourage artistic and cultural awakening.

3. AIC Colombia – Mocoa: Construction of a model house with recycled bricks

Making eco-bricks to build a 'model' house is a good example of AIC Mocoa in Colombia's sustainable development action. The project encourages the creation of useful materials from rubbish and highlights the need to develop innovative ideas. In addition, the process emphasizes the importance of ongoing community initiatives.



4. AIC France – Saint Valery-en-Caux: community garden



The volunteers in Saint-Valery-en-Caux have begun the cultivation of a community garden for disadvantaged people. The objective of this project is to be able to offer people fruits and vegetables while at the same time helping people to reevaluate their understanding of community gardening. This project provides disadvantaged people with healthy food and is an easy project to carry out... but it does require perseverance and a certain humility in

the face of the whims of nature (no season or year is the same as the previous season or year). One learns how to live in accord with the rhythms of the seasons.

5. AIC Madagascar – Manaskara/Vohipenko: sustainable agriculture

For some time the AIC volunteers in Manaskara have engaged in the cultivation of rice with mothers and their older children... putting into practice the advice of agricultural technicians who are concerned about preserving the environment and making the fields more productive.



The AIC groups in Ambolos and Vohipenko are engaged in projects that revolve around the cultivation of food and the planting of fruit trees. Families raise their own poultry and utilize the excrement of the poultry for fertilizer.

These two AIC groups collaborate with the Diocese of Farafangana's Green Plan, which is geared toward protecting the environment.

6. AIC Philippines – Pampanga: manufacture of solar lamps and fight against erosion



The AIC volunteers are participating in an exciting five year environmental project: planting 500 tree seedlings per hectare and maintaining a 7 hectare plot on the slopes of the Mont Pinatubo dykes. By preventing the erosion of the dykes, the trees that are planted will help to save lives if there are typhoons.

Furthermore, some volunteers have specialized in making solar lamps by putting together the component pieces... these lamps will in turn be sold (at an affordable and equitable price) to poor families. There are also several advantages to using solar lamps: they eliminate the use of candles, which can cause fires, especially in poorer areas; they can be used in times of crisis or typhoon, when there is no electrical power; they provide light without any expense except the manufacturing of the lamp --- there are no more electricity bills to pay every month; they help to prevent global warming as they use a renewable source of energy.

7. AIC United Kingdom – education for sustainable development

The AIC volunteers are raising awareness in the parish communities and the parish school about the concern for sustainable development. They are doing this through concrete and practical education with regard to environmental issues. They promote simple lifestyles and solidarity with those who are poor. People are invited to make simple gestures, for example, reducing and controlling their use of energy by using low energy consumption light bulbs, recycling, car-sharing, utilizing left-over food; etc.



8. AIC Vietnam - Ho Chi Minh: Waste sorting for better sustainable development



Garbage and waste are a societal and an environmental problem. Better sorting will reduce the cost of recycling and create a more favorable environment. The purposes of this project are: to put in place measures to have clean and healthy living conditions and to establish a society that recycles wastes. The main and most important aim is to sensitize all people to the project (especially

younger generation of the Vincentian Family) and to give people the means and methods to sort waste more easily.

9. AIC USA – Sustainable distribution of food

The AIC volunteers combine the distribution of food with a focus on greater sustainability: including for example, more fresh fruit and seasonal vegetables. They are careful about people taking only that which is necessary or which they can consume before the product spoils. The volunteers, concerned about bettering their activity in the future, state that the distribution of fresh products to people in need is simply a step toward the better utilization of natural resources.



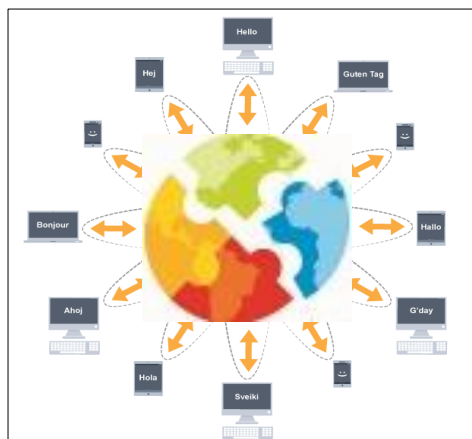
Means of Communication in the AIC Network

Alicia Duhne and Tayde de Callatay

Invitation to the National Presidents to achieve better communication:

In order to achieve more efficient and effective communication with AIC International:

- Read carefully the whole content of the communication that you receive.
- When requested, disseminate the information to the members of your group and/or association. Your role in this matter is essential.
- Try to answer clearly and accurately all the questions that are asked.
- Write your communication in the clearest possible manner.
- Remember that the members of the International Secretariat work part-time and receive many emails and therefore cannot always respond immediately to the messages that they receive. If you have an urgent request, make that request known in a timely manner.
- Respect deadlines for sending information that has been requested. For example, responses to questionnaires in order to draft various AIC reports; activity and financial reports; registration and travel information for seminars and assemblies.
- Inform the International Secretariat with details about the contact person of the Association and if that person is not the President (which can happen because of language abilities) then the President should receive a copy of all correspondence.
- Communicate in a timely fashion the election of a new President and/or members of the National Board and/or national advisor (names and email addresses should be sent to the Secretariat).
- Communicate the date of your National Assembly to the Continental Coordinator and the International Secretariat.



In order to take advantage of and enliven the AIC International Facebook page:

- Share with us news about your activities and the life of your groups by sending us a text of no more than three lines and/or some photographs (good quality).
- If you like a particular new item, click on “like” because that will give greater visibility to that story.

In order to take advantage of and enliven the AIC International website:

- Share with us news about your activities by sending us reports (between 10 and 30 lines) and photographs (good quality), especially photographs that show the interaction between the members of the groups and the people that are being served.
- Share with us information about your projects by utilizing the template format that we have developed for the new webpage. Our next goal, one which you can help us achieve, is to showcase on our website a project for every country where we are present.
- Share with us the initiatives that you have taken during this time of the 400th anniversary of the origin of our charism and initiatives that are in line with the theme of welcoming the stranger.

Question: How do you suggest we could improve our communication with you?

Statutory Assembly 2017

Tayde de Callataj, General Manager

The Statutory Assembly took place on March 15th, 2017. Thirty-eight national associations were present and represented.

The International Executive Activity Report 2015-2016 was approved as was the Financial Report and the provisional budget for 2017-2019.

The Assembly approved the admission of AIC Curacao as a member with full rights and obligations. The Assembly also noted the fact



that the AIC Congo Brazzaville is no longer a member in good standing. The International Executive Board made the delegates aware of the fact that a new group is being formed, AIC Cambodia.

There was also the approval of some changes to the Canonical Statutes, changes that were necessitated by the new Civil Law Constitution as well as by recent changes that have taken place in the Vatican. Those changes had been approved by the Vatican which enabled them to be implemented immediately. Some additional changes to the AIC Civil Law Constitution and By-Laws were also approved. Specifically, there was a change with regard to the frequency of our Assemblies (instead of being held every two years, they will be held every three years) and this change was made because of the cost of such assemblies and the time that is needed to prepare for such an important event. There was also a redefinition of the conditions for being admitted as a full rights member. There were some additional modifications in order to conclude the process that dealt with the functioning of the International Secretariat (that process was initiated in Guatemala).

During the Assembly the following persons were elected to the International Executive Board for the period of 2017-2020:

Alicia DUHNE	President
Elisabeth GINDRE	Vice-President
Maria Eugenia MAGALLANES NEGRETE	Vice-President
Anne BEMMO	Member
Mary-Ann DANTUANO	Member
Melodee Marciana DE CASTRO	Member
Clara Inés DIAZ HENAO	Member
Milagros GALISTEO MOYA	Member
Mia LATRILLE	Member
Dee MANSI	Member

Conclusion of the President: Evaluation and Commitments

Alicia Duhne, International President

We are about to conclude this Assembly which will remain in our memory as one of the most precious gifts that Our Lord and Saint Vincent have given us.

It has been a pleasure to share these past four days with you, and to share this time with you in the place where Saint Vincent initiated this Association four hundred years ago with twelve committed women.

We have had some wonderful experiences as well as times of learning.

We see that we still have some tremendous challenges. We have received a heritage that our Founders, led by Vincent de Paul and accompanied by Louise de Marillac, built up. That work has been passed on to us by the countless volunteers who have gone before us.

We should feel responsible for continuing this work for many more years... for 100, 200, 500 and more years!

We are convinced that we need to continue to adapt and to renew many of our projects. It is also urgent that we become ever more aware of the new forms of poverty that are present in our midst today.

Many of our brothers and sisters have great needs. Therefore, in the words of Saint Vincent, I invite you to go out to meet them as if you were running to put out a fire, going out to encounter them with great love because they are our *lords and masters*.

Perhaps there is a need to return to “that first love” of our Association, that love that enflamed our hearts when we first became members. May the joy that we experience today, never cease to be a part of us so that those who live in the midst of poverty, the men and women who we serve, might recognize us by the smile that is on our face.

It is also important to remember that when we are united with other entities, we are stronger. Therefore, I encourage you to form ever expanding networks with other people and associations in your area, that is, with other AIC groups, with other branches of the Vincentian Family, with other church groups, with other non-governmental agencies, with other active groups in the community, etc.

The future is in our hands and depends upon the activities that we engage in day after day.

I am also grateful to the many people who have made contributed to the success of this Assembly:

- To the inhabitants of Châtillon who welcomed us... and I include here the volunteers and the Daughters of Charity who minister in this beautiful town;
- To the presenters and the facilitators who shared their insights with us;

- To the many working groups who organized and supported each of the various activities that we engaged in;
- To Laurence de la Brosse who for more than one year was working and organizing this event with the volunteers of this town and the volunteers throughout France;
- To the logistical team, the members of the International Secretariat who for months have been attentive to all the different details that are so necessary when organizing such an event;
- To the translators who accompanied us in such a generous manner... because of them we were able to hear and to listen to one another in a more effective manner.

I conclude by thanking you, the volunteers, the advisors and all those who have participated in this assembly; thank you for your patience and your understanding. This experience that we have shared together will forever remain etched in my mind and in my heart.

May God bless all of you!!



AIC – International Association of Charities

An international network of more than 150,000 volunteers, principally made up of women, who act locally in 53 countries to fight against poverty.

Founded by Saint Vincent de Paul in 1617, to fight against all forms of poverty and injustice and give women an active and recognised social role, in a spirit of solidarity.

Following this International Assembly of Delegates, AIC adopted the following **Priority Lines of Action 2017-2020**:

- 1. To promote through education holistic human development for the care of our Common Home, personally and in our AIC actions,** trying to retain a harmonious balance: with God, between people, with nature.
- 2. To strengthen our Vincentian identity,** basing ourselves on the initial values of our founder and constantly looking for ways to better serve our brothers and sisters.
- 3. To encourage responsibility and service in leadership,** always being attentive to good communication.

Collaboration for this edition:

Authors:

Bénédicte de Bellefroid, Laurence de la Brosse,
Tayde de Callataÿ, Sr. Pilar Caycho DC, Marina Costa,
Agnès Dandois, Alicia Duhne, F. A. Mauricio Fernández CM,
F. Celestino Fernández CM, F. Tomaz Mavric CM,
Patricia Palacios de Nava, Sr. Françoise Petit DC, Anne Sturm

Translation:

F. Charles T. Plock CM and Joanna Waller

Layout and Design:

Catherine Avery



The training booklets can be downloaded from the AIC website www.aic-international.org

Editor-in-Chief: Tayde de Callataÿ – Rampe des Ardennais, 23 – 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve – Belgium